

Weekly

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Ephemeral hopes

A week of transmutations: Blair's Euro initiative becomes American; a 4-way London peace conference turns out to be bilateral meetings, with Albright, in London. **Graham Usher** in Jerusalem and **Dina Ezzat** in Cairo find little to look forward to, save more Palestinian concessions

For the briefest of moments this week, it appeared that British Premier Tony Blair's achievement in Ireland the week before might be rapidly complemented by an equally dramatic success in the Middle East. Within the Palestinian Authority (PA) especially, there was an almost desperate hope that his peace-making skills could be transferred to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. And early signs seemed to support these expectations.

"I am prepared to go anywhere, at any time, and specifically in the next month to go to any location and possibly to London to advance the [peace] process," Netanyahu told a press conference on Sunday after his initial meeting with Blair. Rumours immediately spread of a four-way "peace conference" in London on 4 May consisting of Netanyahu, Yasser Arafat, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Blair, in Britain's current capacity as president of the European Union (EU). Expectations were raised further when the Palestinian leader said he would "look favourably" on any "quadrilateral" meeting since the Palestinians "are concerned to see an active European role in the various phases of the process."

But, as so often with Netanyahu, the illusion of progress collapsed almost immediately. At a cabinet meeting on Monday, Netanyahu made it clear that the meeting in London would not be an international or EU-mediated "summit", but a bilateral meeting with Albright focused on resolving "interim" issues such as the Gaza airport and a joint PA-Israeli industrial park in the Gaza Strip. He did not rule out a meeting with Arafat (who will be having his own "separate meeting" with Albright in London on the same day), but added that "no such meeting has been planned". To dampen the euphoria still more, US State Department spokesperson, James Rubin, said that the bilateral meetings in London had been arranged prior to Blair's visit and that, although the British premier may have encouraged Arafat and Netanyahu to meet, he was "not aware at this point that there has been any substantive change in the position of either of the parties."

Sources in Cairo believe that a meeting between Arafat and Netanyahu will likely take place in London, but caution that such a meeting will have been futile if it falls short of producing a clear-cut Israeli commitment on implementation of already-signed accords.

Neither is Cairo encouraged by Blair's emphasising of "confidence-building" measures such as the Gaza airport or industrial park. "There is no confidence-building measure other than honouring what has been agreed upon, and implementing what has been signed by the previous [Israeli] government, and by the present government in [the Hebron accord of] July 1996," President Hosni Mubarak said in a joint press conference with the British premier in Cairo 48 hours before the announcement of the London meeting.

In fact, the only change has been on the Palestinian side. Giving his clearest endorsement yet of the still-unpublished US "initiative", Arafat said at a press conference in Gaza with Blair that the PA "would respond positively to the American ideas, as we have done before." His only condition now is that the US go ahead and make them public. Arafat wants publication of the initiative partly to put pressure on US-Israeli relations, since Netanyahu is currently rejecting the US proposal of 13.1 per cent further redeployment in the West Bank, and partly because he fears that US special envoy Dennis Ross may dilute the initiative even more when he returns to Israel next week. In an interview on Palestinian television on 18 April, Arafat said that he had accepted the US initiative "on condition" that it preserves all parts of the 1997 Hebron agreement, specifically Israel's commitment to complete a third redeployment "no later than mid-1998". Should the US abandon its guarantee of a third redeployment (to win Netanyahu's endorsement of a more generous second redeployment), Arafat may well withdraw his support.

"It is important to realise that it is President [Bill] Clinton himself who has been withholding [the publication of] this package," said one Egyptian source. Sources in Cairo revealed that the original 13.1 per cent second redeployment suggested by Washington and rejected by Israel has been slashed to little over 8 per cent in the second redeployment, to be followed by something over two per cent in a third — and final — redeployment. The last tranche would, moreover, take the form of "area C" redeployment, which would hand over to the Palestinians only municipal authority while Israel maintains control over security.

The agenda of the expected London meeting is still being worked out. It is expected, however, that it will address only the concept, rather than the exact scale, of Israeli redeployments, as well as ways to get both the US and the EU to engage with the Israelis and the Palestinians in arrangements over such "confidence-building" measures as operating the Gaza air and sea ports, the joint Israeli-Palestinian industrial park and the construction of a Gaza-West Bank safe passage.

Yet, despite the lack of any real results, Arafat and other PA officials still appeared genuinely upbeat about the Blair trip. "We believe the visit represents an escalating European role in pushing the peace process forward, despite Israel's continuous attempts to deny [the EU a role]," the PA's presidential adviser, Nabil Abu Rdeineh, told Voice of Palestine radio on 21 April. In Gaza, Blair made it clear what he thought that role should be. There he stressed that Europe should not do anything that would "cut across the US peace efforts," but should rather focus on "economic issues".

And there is much the EU can do economically, say Palestinian sources, if it has the political will.

Unlike the US (which treats Israel and the Occupied Territories as a single "unitary" economy), the EU has separate trade agreements with Israel and the PLO. According to one Palestinian economist, this means that "in practical terms", the EU "defines" the West Bank and Gaza as a sovereign economy separate from Israel. Since Israel's closure policies routinely "interfere" with this agreement, the EU could, if it chooses, impose economic sanctions against Israel, or at least remove the various economic privileges it currently enjoys. Given that the EU is Israel's biggest trade partner, taking 40 per cent of all Israeli exports, such a move could have a noticeable impact on the Israeli economy.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

"Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,/Who is already sick and pale with grief,/That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she..." Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo presented this sleek, sultry *Romeo and Juliet* on 13 April: a thrilling performance, entirely devoid of maudlin sentimentality. No deaths here: only poison in the pirouettes. The stars were shining bright. Jean-Christophe Maillot's choreography left those who thought they knew it all gasping for breath.
(see p.12)

Cairo consultations

FRESH from talks with King Fahd in Saudi Arabia, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat stopped over in Cairo yesterday for consultations with President Hosni Mubarak on the continuing stalemate in Middle East peace-making, reports **Nevine Khalil**.

Another visitor to Cairo next Tuesday will be Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, whose hardline policies forced the peace process to grind to a halt.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who was present at the Mubarak-Arafat meeting, told reporters the two leaders discussed the situation along the Palestinian-Israeli track of negotiations. Also under discussion were the ideas carried by American envoy Dennis Ross, who is returning to the region tomorrow, and the separate meetings between Arafat, Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, planned for 4 May in London, Moussa said.

He pointed out that the success of the London talks depends on whether an "understanding" could be reached on the American ideas.

Mubarak and Arafat agreed that the Egyptian-Palestinian consultations would continue following Ross's tour of the region, Moussa added.

"The Palestinians are willing to accept the US initiative, but the problem lies with the Israeli government," Moussa asserted.

As for Netanyahu's talks in Cairo, Moussa said they will focus on "what is happening in the peace process and the grave possibility of its collapse, if the present situation continues. This is an attempt to salvage the peace process by restoring it to the correct framework, and not at any price."

INSIDE

Ten, nine, eight...

The countdown has started for the first Egyptian satellite to be sent into space. **Rehab Saad** reports

On 28 April, 1.30am Cairo time, a French Ariane rocket will be launched from Korou in French Guyana, carrying the Egyptian media satellite Nilesat to its orbit in outer space. The event will be broadcast live by Egyptian television.

"The time is approaching. A dream is about to come true," said Amin Bassiouni, board chairman of the Egyptian satellite company Nilesat. The $160 million satellite was transported from Toulouse, France, where it was built by Matra Marconi, to Korou on 23 March. On 14 April, it was placed atop the Ariane rocket. The two were then brought to the launching pad.

After a 200-kilometre journey to outer space, the satellite and rocket will separate. Nilesat will be controlled by tracking stations in Toulouse and Perth, Australia. "Putting the satellite in its orbit will take six days," Bassiouni said. "On 20 May, the satellite will gradually start transmitting shows to television and radio channels."

On 31 May, Media Day, President Hosni Mubarak will inaugurate Nilesat's ground station at Sixth of October City, signalling that the satellite is now operational.

Once in orbit, Nilesat will make Egypt the first Arab country to have its own media satellite, thus joining the international outer space club as its 60th member. Nilesat will cover the entire Arab world, from the Atlantic to the Gulf, as well as parts of Africa and southern Europe.

"Egypt has always been a media pioneer," said Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif, pointing out Nilesat and the Media Production City in Sixth of October City as the greatest achievements in the field. "Nilesat is important because, using the most advanced technology, it will broadcast to the new communities at Toshka, Oweinat [south-west Egypt] and the Gulf of Suez."

Officials boast that Nilesat uses the "technology of the future" — a digital compression system — instead of the analogue system. The new system makes it possible to compress more than one television channel in the same transponder.

"Nilesat has 12 transponders; each can carry six or even seven television channels which means the satellite can carry 72, or even 84 channels, if needed," Bassiouni said.

He added that the digital system also makes it possible to encode [encrypt] some of these channels so that they are viewed only by subscribers. Twenty channels will be available openly, including the new specialised channels of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). The channels will include programmes covering education, culture, sports, family affairs, children, news shows and entertainment, in addition to the programmes found on local and satellite channels already in operation. Some Arab channels will also be available openly from Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, Jordan and Lebanon. Viewers will need to buy a special decoder to watch the Arab stations, including the ANN news channel, but no subscription fee is required.

About 23 channels will be encrypted, including the Pioneers Group (ART), Showtime, the second Egyptian satellite channel and Lebanon's LBC-plus. Viewers will need decoders and have to pay subscription fees.

According to Bassiouni, some ministries such as education and health, as well as universities such as Cairo University, are planning to make use of the satellite. "One transponder has been rented by the Ministry of Education. It will include pre-university education and programmes for the eradication of illiteracy," he said. "There will be two channels allowing interaction between students and the satellite. If a student misses a programme, he can simply dial a telephone number and the lesson will be repeated just for him."

The Ministry of Health, Bassiouni added, has rented a TV channel to broadcast health shows as well as programmes for training doctors. Cairo University has rented a channel for university programmes, while three more channels have been allocated to other universities and higher institutes.

One plus for Nilesat is that its transmissions can be picked up by relatively small dishes, ranging in diameter from 50 to 75 centimetres, that can be installed on a balcony, not necessarily on a roof.

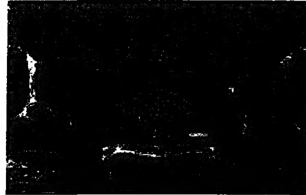
Another advantage is that Nilesat is devoted exclusively to multi-media broadcasting services, data information and interaction. "Businessmen will be able to acquire data or get to the Internet by way of electronic communication cards, which is of great value to them," said Salah Hamza, head of Nilesat's engineering department.

The press also stands to benefit. "We are negotiating with *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Akhbar* newspapers to transmit pages from their printing presses in Egypt to their offices in other Arab countries," Bassiouni said.

In addition to the ground station at Sixth of October City, a back-up station is located at Al-Hammam, near Marsa Matrouh. A reserve satellite has also been built should problems arise during the launch of the original.

The idea of launching an Egyptian satellite dates back to the 1970s when it became clear that the use of satellites was spreading worldwide. To prepare itself, the government reserved an orbital path in 1977. In November 1995, a contract was signed between ERTU and the Matra Marconi Space Company, which built Nilesat. The Ariane Company was chosen to launch Nilesat, using an Ariane-4 rocket.

Nilesat was established in July 1996. Work followed on the ground stations, renting out transponders and channels and providing Egyptian engineers with the necessary training.






Cairo diplomacy last week (l-r): Mubarak with British PM Blair; Iraqi Foreign Minister El-Sahhaf; Lebanese PM Al-Hariri; and US Secretary of Defence Cohen

Baghdad seeks Cairo's good offices

The Iraqi foreign minister stopped over in Cairo last weekend to convey a verbal message from Saddam Hussein to President Mubarak. Dina Ezzat assesses the implications of the visit

It was at very short notice that Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Said El-Sahhaf visited Cairo last Saturday for talks with no less a figure than President Hosni Mubarak on the scope of what is feared may be another crisis-in-the-making between Baghdad and UNSCOM — the committee in charge of dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

"It was a pretty sudden visit, but the President agreed to receive him," a diplomatic source said.

The Iraqi official found Cairo's position unchanged. He was informed that Baghdad should spare no effort in complying with UN Security Council resolutions. In the meantime, Cairo will continue to underline the need to ease the sufferings of the Iraqi people and oppose the use of force against Iraq.

The meeting between Mubarak and Sahhaf was their second since February. Sources suggest that the meeting was important for Sahhaf because it enhanced Iraq's efforts to break out of its isolation in the Arab world. It also meant that a slight improvement in bilateral relations might be possible despite the persistent political differences between Cairo and Baghdad. Diplomatic relations were broken off at the time of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Sahhaf, who also met with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, complained about a report submitted by Richard Butler, the chief weapons inspector, to the UN Security Council. The UN report said the inspectors had made "virtually no progress" in the past six months in verifying that Iraq had destroyed its remaining weapons of mass destruction, if any. This can only mean that there is no immediate end in sight to the crippling economic sanctions that have been imposed on Iraq over the last seven years.

According to informed sources, Sahhaf complained about Butler's attitude, arguing that keeping Butler as the head of UNSCOM meant that problems could erupt at any time between Baghdad and the weapons inspectors.

"The Iraqis want Egypt's support," a source said. "They want Egypt to use its good relations with Arab and Western countries to explain that Baghdad is doing all it can to comply, that the report is unfair and that efforts should be made now to start lifting the sanctions."

The source said that Egypt wants to help, "but it also has to think of the Kuwaitis, who still feel very bitter about the Iraqi [invasion]. There are also certain circles within the Saudi government who advocate a great deal of caution in dealing with Saddam's regime."

Following the meeting between Sahhaf and Moussa, the two ministers addressed a joint news conference. They seemed to show less awkwardness in dealing with one another compared to their last appearance together in February. Sahhaf even went as far as to refer to Moussa as "His excellency, brother Amr."

"We talked about certain aspects of inter-Arab relations and about the situation in the region," Moussa said.

Sahhaf was asked whether Iraq was prepared to take action to solve the problem of the Kuwaiti prisoners of war, which lies behind the Kuwaiti veto on Iraq's re-integration into the Arab world. "Within the context of Arab relations, there is no concept of a veto," Sahhaf responded. "Rather, we presume that there are certain common assessments of the [Arab world's] supreme interests. We hope that there is no Arab state that would oppose or work against the lifting of sanctions imposed on an [Arab] people."

The impression in political circles is that the latest dispute between Iraq and UNSCOM is unlikely to mushroom into a major crisis.

Asked about a conference on humanitarian assistance to Iraq hosted by Britain, Moussa said that Egypt was not invited and understands that most of the invited Arab countries would not attend.

Sahhaf explicitly criticised the conference as an attempt to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs.

Sahhaf later departed for New York to explain his country's viewpoint to the Security Council. He described Butler's report as "full of inaccurate and baseless allegations that Iraq could easily refute."

Withdrawal: conditional or unconditional?

Lebanon's prime minister consulted with President Mubarak on Israel's offer of a conditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon

President Hosni Mubarak met with Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri on Tuesday for consultations on Israel's belated acceptance of a 20-year-old UN Security Council resolution calling for its unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Israel has attached strings to the implementation of Resolution 425, insisting that security arrangements should be worked out first.

Following the talks with Mubarak, Al-Hariri said Lebanon had the right to reject the Israeli conditions "because they harm our sovereignty and rights." What Lebanon is prepared to accept, he added, is "the unconditional pullout of Israeli troops from Lebanon."

Both Egypt and Syria back the Lebanese position.

Al-Hariri urged Egypt and the United States to help push forward the Middle East peace process because, he said, this would "greatly benefit the Israeli, Syrian and Lebanese peoples." He blamed Israel for the current stalemate but, on a more optimistic note, said there "could be a chance now for us all to return to the negotiating table and pick up again from where we stopped."

During a visit to Cairo last Sunday, US Defence Secretary William Cohen urged both Lebanon and Syria to react positively to the Israeli proposal. Responding to this, Al-Hariri said: "We informed the American side that Lebanon supports part of the Israeli proposal" — alluding to the unconditional implementation of Resolution 425. Al-Hariri added that Lebanon "asked the US to assist in achieving this."

Al-Hariri is expected to visit Morocco, Britain, France, Russia and China to rally support for Lebanon's position.

According to diplomatic sources in Cairo, Egypt shares Lebanese and Syrian apprehensions about the escalating Israeli media campaign regarding the conditional withdrawal offer.

"This campaign is not about 425 because 425 is about unconditional withdrawal; 426 spells out the details of how 425 should be implemented. So there is no need to discuss implementation," an Egyptian diplomatic source said.

This is also the Syrian position. "The Lebanon case is one thing which Egypt is always keen to coordinate with Syria," the source added.

Al-Hariri's tour appears to be part of a Lebanese-Syrian counter-campaign to explain the reasons why Beirut is suspicious of the Israeli offer. Egypt is certainly in a position to help.

"It should not be ignored that Egypt has diplomatic relations with Israel and that Egypt talks with Israel about the future of the peace process," a source said.

Moreover, Egypt has an open channel with Washington, which has been putting pressure on Lebanon and Syria to consider the Israeli offer.

Sources suggest that there are already some sort of "informal contacts" between Lebanon and Israel about the nature of the security arrangements Tel Aviv is expecting. Parallel to this, it is said, the Lebanese government is holding talks with leaders of the Hizbullah resistance movement about whether they are ready to accept a certain "code of conduct" in return for a full Israeli withdrawal.

Senior Egyptian officials, including Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, have repeatedly stated the official Egyptian line. "If the Israelis want to withdraw, let them withdraw," Moussa said. "But given the stalemate on the Palestinian-Israeli track that has resulted from Israel shirking its commitments, the Lebanese would be justifiably very apprehensive about entering into talks that could well lead to nothing."

Moussa affirmed that Egypt's position on the matter is based on continuous consultations with the Lebanese and Syrian governments. "Lebanon knows what is good for its own people and Egypt will support the Lebanese stance," Moussa said. He added that Lebanese officials believe that the Israeli offer is "not faithful to the letter of Resolutions 425 and 426."

At a lecture at Cairo University late on Tuesday, Al-Hariri told his audience that Lebanon will not sign a unilateral peace agreement with Israel on its own. "We support comprehensive peace. Lebanon will never sign a unilateral peace agreement with Israel. This is something which will not happen, and which we do not accept," he said.

Al-Hariri added, "We have all seen what happened after the Palestinians signed a unilateral peace agreement with Israel," indicating that Lebanon would not allow itself to be put under strong Israeli pressure.

Al-Hariri also pointed out Lebanon's rejection of Israel's condition demanding the integration of its allied militia, the South Lebanon Army, SLA, into the official Lebanese army. "The SLA are agents of the Israeli army who are working closely with it in the occupied area. How can Lebanon accept those people and give them positions and allow them to be part of Lebanon's army?" he asked.

Al-Hariri confirmed that Beirut will not disarm the Hizbullah resistance in south Lebanon as long as Israel continues to occupy the country's so-called "security zone." He also denied that Lebanon was conducting any secret negotiations with Israel. "Why should we enter secret negotiations with Israel? We have nothing to hide, and we are ready to live in peace with Israel," he said.

The Lebanese premier said that peace with Israel was an Arab, not just a Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian or Syrian concern. He emphasised the brotherly and strong relations between his country and Syria, saying that the two countries had an agreement that neither would enter unilateral peace negotiations with Israel.

*Reported by **Dina Ezzat, Nevine Khalil** and **Maye Ostowani***

KFC in the contest over social justice

Rival factions are battling for control of the Social Justice Party, and particularly its weekly newspaper, trading accusations of bribery, forgery and fried chicken. Fatemah Farag steps into the dispute

Not many people have heard of the three-year-old Social Justice Party, yet its newspaper — *Al-Watan Al-Arabi* — has become one of the most widely-read weekly newspapers in Egypt. Sporting pictures of scantily-clad women and headlines like "The Rape of Veiled Women in London," *Al-Watan Al-Arabi* managed to increase its circulation from 20,000 to 120,000 in a single year.

But all that may be coming to an end. Dissenters, claiming that sensationalism has given Social Justice a bad name, recently proclaimed a takeover of the party. In the wake of this move, a new editorial board issued a conspicuously serious version of *Al-Watan Al-Arabi* that went out of its way to appease businessmen criticised by the old editors early in the week. Meanwhile the ousted leadership is disputing the alleged takeover and has published its version of the paper on time — headlines and content as racy as ever.

So, can the heated and convoluted events of the past week be explained as a tug-of-war between sensationalists and advocates of serious journalism? Is it due to conflicting business interests? Or are other forces at play?

Events took a decisive turn when the dissenters, headed by Abdel-Rashid Ahmed, held what they claimed was a legal general assembly on 16 April. The gathering decided to remove party chairman Mohamed Abdel-Aal from all party positions, elect Ahmed as the new party head and take over all party offices and assets. More than 400 party members signed a petition to this effect.

"Documents which prove Abdel-Aal's many malpractices — financial and other — were handed to the Committee of Political Parties at the Shura Council as well as to the Prosecutor's Office. Further, we have notified banks not to deal with him and asked the Prosecutor's office to force him to give up control of the various party offices," explained Ahmed.

In their defense, Abdel-Aal and a handful of party members held a news conference on 19 April at which they claimed that the 16 April meeting was illegal and did not represent the party membership. "The first time we heard about the meeting was from the newspapers the following day," Azza Kamel, a party member and Abdel-Aal's wife, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "I then called the Kemet Hotel where the meeting was held and found out that it was a complete farce."

Security at the party headquarters in Mohandessin was tight and to get past the high black metal gates, a caller had to produce an identity card and undergo scrutiny by guards. Inside, Abdel-Aal detailed his version of the general assembly meeting. "They pulled in people off the streets, such as construction workers, micro-bus drivers and their customers as well as ignorant women in slippers with children on their shoulders," he said, sitting in front of a poster which spelled out the aims of the party, which include justice and fraternity.

According to Abdel-Aal, the people who were summoned from the streets were each given sums ranging between LE10 and LE40 and a dinner box from Kentucky Fried Chicken in return for filling a membership form and chanting slogans against Abdel-Aal. To document their case, Abdel-Aal's faction displayed a folder filled with signed statements by hotel staff along with Abdel-Rashid Ahmed's hand-written resignation from the party.

"These are all lies and forgeries," scoffed Ahmed, who is claiming victory. "Our general assembly was an uprising against corruption. Members were becoming ashamed of the party which had turned its newspaper into a sensationalist rag, attacking everyone and making enemies for no reason," he told the *Weekly*. The new *Al-Watan Al-Arabi* provided full coverage of what it called, in banner headline, the "Fall of the Despot Mohamed Abdel-Aal." The inside pages carried an apology from the new editors to the alleged victims of the previous sensationalist policy. They included businessman Ahmed Bahgat and former interior minister Hassan El-Alfi.

"They should have been more discreet," snickered Abdel-Aal, who promised that the general assembly meeting announced on 14 April would take place as scheduled on 24 April. Abdel-Aal claimed that businessmen who were targeted by the newspaper were behind the attempt to remove him from the party's chairmanship. He also accuses a prominent opposition party member of manoeuvering to take over the paper.

But then Abdel-Aal does not have the best of records. A stout defender of the now-repealed Law 93, which curtailed press freedoms, he was expelled two years ago from the Press Syndicate. Although he obtained a court order in his favour, prominent syndicate members claim Abdel-Aal never bothered to inform the Syndicate formally.

Further, there is the case of Mohamed El-Ghalban, who works for the newspaper and was arrested while accepting a LE50,000 bribe from a businessman in exchange for ending a critical campaign launched against him by the newspaper. Although Abdel-Aal says he had nothing to do with the bribe, El-Ghalban and others claim otherwise.

The Committee for Political Parties has yet to meet to debate the dispute, and the outcome of the whole affair is still unclear. However, the events to date may shed light on some of the murkier depths of the "yellow press" quagmire.

Police officer taken into custody

Investigations continue in Bilqas, as the public prosecutor moves to head off further protests

The name of the small Nile Delta town of Bilqas has been in the news since the beginning of April when a young man died, allegedly as a result of police torture, triggering two days of anti-government riots, writes **Fatemah Farag**. Accusing fingers were pointed at police Maj. Ihab Shabana, who interrogated Wahid El-Sayed Abdallah in connection with a theft committed by his step-brother. Following the interrogation, a police vehicle brought Abdallah's body and dumped it outside his home. The riots followed.

On 19 April prosecution authorities ordered Shabana to be held in custody for four days pending an investigation into Abdallah's death. Four detectives were also taken into custody.

Until then, the Interior Ministry, which had previously ordered Shabana to be suspended from work, had been in charge of the investigation. The prosecutor's order changes the status of the investigation from an administrative to a criminal investigation.

But Gamal Barakat, a lawyer for the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights who has been monitoring the situation, cautioned that the order "is not a drastic move. It is routine to take into custody for four days anyone who is under investigation. This period may later be extended. Whether this will result in concrete action against the officer is still not clear."

Shabana claimed he was not at the police station when Abdallah was brought in for questioning. However, he was contradicted by his driver and other officials at the police station as well as by Reda Ibrahim El-Saqqa — a detainee who claims to have witnessed Abdallah's torture. "He [Shabana] says he was out on a job in Gamassa, which is true," explained Barakat, "but he got back to the station early and did not sign his name in the book, which is why he can claim he was not there."

The initial report written by the Bilqas prosecutor did not document any clear signs of torture. However, the coroner's report pointed to "criminal" reasons for Abdallah's death. Lawyers who have had access to the report told *Al-Ahram Weekly* the coroner reached the conclusion that Abdallah's death was a result of damage to the testicles and electrocution.

Leftist MP snipes at culture minister

Farouk Hosni defended the Culture Ministry's policies in parliament last week against allegations of corruption and wrongdoing made by a leftist deputy. Gamal Essam El-Din followed the debate

El-Badri Farghali, a leftist member of the People's Assembly, took Culture Minister Farouk Hosni to task last week for what he called the "unprecedented number of cases of corruption, deviation and shady practice" in the ministry. Responding to Farghali's interpellation [a question posed in parliament that must be answered], Hosni said the accusations were unfounded and could easily be refuted by documents in his possession.

Most of Farghali's accusations focused on antiquities. He charged that artifacts were being smuggled out of the country and that some ancient monuments were either in a state of disrepair or restoration was entrusted to companies that lack the necessary expertise.

"Can you believe that a French restoration team has systematically plundered the Temple of Karnak for the past 33 years?" Farghali asked. "The minister knows of this and has never done anything to stop it." Farghali claimed that artifacts had been detached using electrical saws and smuggled out of the country to be sold in Europe. As a result, he said, several countries have been able to establish special museums for pharaonic antiquities. "Do you know that advertisements for the sale of Egyptian antiquities now appear in foreign newspapers?" Farghali asked in parliament.

Farghali charged that Hosni awarded a tender for the restoration of the Hanging Church in Old Cairo to a company that lacks the necessary experience. He also accused the minister of neglecting other Christian and Islamic monuments, even though they needed urgent repairs. "It was President Mubarak who took the initiative last month, forcing the minister to take action to save the antiquities of Fatimid Cairo," Farghali said.

Farghali claimed that Hosni violated state law by awarding contracts that would allow foreign, not national, companies to insure Egyptian exhibitions abroad. "As a result, the ministry faced difficulties in recovering insurance costs from US, Australian and Canadian companies," Farghali said. He also charged that warehouses in which some antiques are stored are "in a state of decay, making them an easy target for theft and plunder."

Farghali accused Hosni, who is a painter of renown, of profiteering from his post and "selling Egypt to France in return for a corner in the Louvre" — an allusion to an exhibition of Hosni's paintings at the Paris museum. Hosni was previously accused of ignoring public opposition to holding cultural celebrations marking 200 years since Napoleon Bonaparte first arrived in Egypt. "For us, that was an invasion that should not be celebrated," Farghali said.

Hosni said Farghali's accusations were incoherent, unfounded and unscientific. "I thank you because culture has become a recurring theme on the assembly's agenda," Hosni said. "However, whoever speaks about culture should be a lover of culture. As far as I know, Farghali is not such a person. I never saw him taking part in any cultural event. I have many documents that can refute every single word he has used in making these allegations."

Concerning the Karnak Temple, Hosni said there was no truth to Farghali's accusations. "I wish he had gone with the delegation of the assembly's culture committee on its visit to Luxor to see for himself how excellently the restoration work was carried out. It is shameful to accuse missions of friendly countries, such as France, of stealing antiquities."

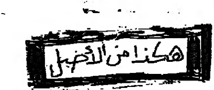
Hosni said the Culture Ministry lacks the necessary funds to rehabilitate the large number of warehouses in which antiquities are stored. "We have achieved a great deal in this connection but we do not have a magic wand that can do everything at once," he added.

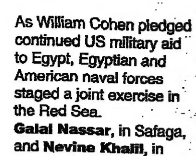
Hosni explained that countries which host exhibitions of Egyptian antiquities stipulate that insurance is the responsibility of their own national companies. "I never violated the law because this is a fact known to all," he said.

Hosni affirmed that he does not trade in paintings. "Art is a gift and I have never profiteered from it. Please mention the name of a single person who has bought a painting from me. I make paintings for museums," he said.

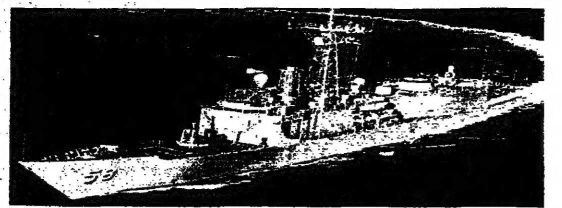
Parliament Speaker Fathi Sorour, backing Hosni, said artists, such as painters and musicians, who sell the products of their creativity, are never viewed as profiteering from their work. It is not considered a commercial activity, Sorour said.

Hosni said the Egyptian-French celebrations marked 200 years of cultural relations and not Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt. "I have just received a book from France about these celebrations," he said. "There was no mention of Bonaparte. For them, his invasion of Egypt was shameful because they were defeated." Hosni emphasised the importance of French-Egyptian relations. "Do you know that French tourists are the only Europeans who still come to Luxor? Don't you see how these people are fond of our culture?"





As William Cohen pledged continued US military aid to Egypt, Egyptian and American naval forces staged a joint exercise in the Red Sea. **Galal Nassar**, in Safaga, and **Nevine Khalil**, in Cairo, report



The USS Samuel B. Roberts, a Perry class guided missile frigate, that took part in the Eagle Salute exercise

A 'close encounter' in Red Sea waters

US Defence Secretary William Cohen met with President Hosni Mubarak on Sunday and said the United States would continue to provide grants and military equipment to help Egypt modernise its armed forces.

Cohen's visit coincided with the start of the joint exercise, code-named Eagle Salute, which Egyptian and American naval forces staged in the Red Sea, in a theatre of operations 120 nautical miles long and 60 nautical miles wide, off the Safaga coast. The climax of the war games was an "encounter exercise" by two Egyptian and American frigates, with the latter simulating an attack against an Egyptian naval base that is repulsed by the former. Egyptian F-16 jetfighters and Beachcraft helicopters and American SH-60 helicopters also took part.

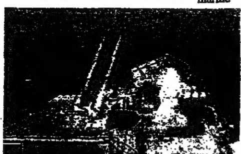
Cohen, emerging from the meeting with Mubarak, said, "The United States will continue to support Egypt's programme to modernise its military. This year we are going to provide $1.3 billion in grants, and our troops are going to continue to exercise and train together."

As part of the American aid, Egypt will receive 50 Avenger mobile launch vehicles with Stinger missiles, two frigates, torpedoes, harpoon anti-ship missiles and tank recovery vehicles, Cohen said.

The Eagle Salute exercise has been staged annually since 1991. It began at noon on Saturday when Egypt's Chinese-made frigate Al-Zafer sailed from the Safaga naval base, followed by the USS Samuel B. Roberts, a perry class guided missile frigate.

Staging "communications checks," the two frigates used flags, lights, radio signals and underwater vibrations to standardise a "language of understanding" — a skill the two sides must acquire before embarking on a joint operation in the same theatre of operations.

This was followed by a "night replenishment at sea" exercise, in which the two frigates came close to each other and were only 100-120 yards apart. Ropes and phosphorous wires were laid down to link the two vessels, which simulated an exchange of messages and a refuelling-at-sea training. According to military sources, this type of exercise is important because, in certain situations, ships need to be supplied at sea with fuel, ammunition and men.



The Egyptian Chinese-made frigate "Al-Zafer" fires depth charges against the submarine simulator

Crewmen from the Egyptian frigate then boarded the American vessel to simulate a "visit, board, search seizure exercise." The scenario is that a foreign vessel is carrying an illegal cargo, such as narcotics, inside territorial waters. It must be stopped and searched and the illegal cargo seized. Four sacks of corn represented the "illegal" cargo aboard the American frigate. Three of them were seized in a record time by the Egyptian crewmen.

On Sunday morning, an anti-submarine exercise was staged. An American SH-60 helicopter dropped into the water a submarine simulator, 160cm long and 30cm wide, which is programmed to move at submarine speed, 10 knots per hour, and produce the same noises of a submarine. The Egyptian frigate reacted by hurling into the sea a sonar, which picked up the noise vibrations produced by the submarine simulator and relayed them back to the frigate. The assumption is that the frigate used depth charges to destroy the submarine.

The two frigates then staged a search and rescue exercise, followed by a surface and air gunnery exercise.

The climax of the war games came Monday morning when the two frigates were locked in an "encounter exercise." The American frigate, backed by SH-60 helicopters, staged a mock attack against an Egyptian naval base in an attempt to occupy it. The mock attack was repulsed by the Egyptian frigate and F-16 jetfighters.

Before the exercise began, Commander Christopher M. Wode, captain of the USS Samuel B. Roberts, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he was happy to take part in the joint exercise with the Egyptian naval forces because they have good combat experience. Noting that the important sections of the exercise were being staged at night, Wode said the training is bound to be difficult but useful. He said his ship is equipped with modern weaponry, including the MK13 dual purpose guided missile launcher, which fires both the harpoon surface-to-surface and SM-1 surface-to-air missiles. It is also equipped with MK 75 and 76 guns, that fire 80 rounds per minute and Vulcan Phalanx Close-In Weapons systems that fire 3,000 rounds per minute.

The frigate's mission is to provide air, submarine and surface protection for carrier battle groups, underway replenishment forces, amphibious groups and convoys. Her unique combination of modern sensors and advanced weapons systems allow the ship to fight and survive in the highly complex threat environment of the 1990's and beyond, Wode said.

The frigate's combat systems capability allows it to evaluate threats rapidly, conduct rapid appropriate weapons selection and near instantaneous response to any postulated attack. The systems aboard the ship have been designed to meet these demanding and dynamic prerequisites with minimum human interference, he added.

Wode said the United States has provided Egypt with two frigates of the same class, called Mubarak and Taba. A third, called Sharm El-Sheikh, will arrive in May followed by a fourth, called Toshka. The only difference between the Samuel B. Roberts and the frigates Egypt contracted to buy is the type of helicopter on board. Egypt is getting for its frigates SH-25 helicopters, which are less advanced than the SH-60 helicopters aboard the Samuel B. Roberts.

Vice Admiral Hussein El-Hermeel, commander of the Red Sea naval base, told the *Weekly* that regular joint exercises with US forces are beneficial for the two sides and are bound to improve their combat skills.

Arab Interior and justice ministers met at the Arab League headquarters yesterday to sign their first anti-terrorism treaty. **Mona El-Nahhas** reports on the proceedings, and speaks to Sudanese Interior Minister Maj. Gen. Abdel-Rehim Mohamed Hussein

Arab ministers coordinate war on terrorism

During an extraordinary meeting at the headquarters of the Arab League yesterday, Arab interior and justice ministers or their representatives were scheduled to initial the first treaty promising cooperation in the war against terrorism. Saudi Arabian Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdel-Aziz acted as honourary chairman of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers. The extraordinary meeting was headed by the Qatari interior minister and the Algerian justice minister. Egyptian Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr, who heads the executive bureau of the Council of Arab Justice Ministers, co-chaired the meeting. Also taking part in the conference were Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid and Ahmed bin Mohamed Al-Salem, secretary-general of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers. The Egyptian delegation was headed by Interior Minister Habib El-Adli.

The Arab Treaty for Combating Terrorism, which lays down guidelines for security coordination between Arab countries, was approved in principle by the Council of Arab Interior Ministers in Tunis last January. It was decided then that the signing should be delayed until April because the treaty has certain judicial aspects that need the approval of justice ministers.

The delay provided an opportunity to study questions and concerns expressed by some countries during the Tunis meeting. As a result, a joint committee representing both the interior and justice ministers' councils met in Cairo on 12 March to put the treaty in its final form.

At a meeting with reporters last Saturday, Interior Minister El-Adli described the treaty as an "unprecedented achievement in the field of combating terrorism worldwide". The treaty will take effect immediately after the initialing ceremony and will be binding on all Arab countries, El-Adli said.

The 41-article treaty is split into four parts covering all aspects of security and judicial cooperation for stamping out terrorism.

The treaty commits Arab countries to the war against terrorist crimes. Towards this end, they are required to tighten control on their borders to thwart any attempt at smuggling weapons and explosives or the infiltration of terrorists. Signatories are obligated not to support terrorist acts and to refrain from receiving, training or providing terrorists with weapons.

The treaty also lays down guidelines for the secret exchange of information as well as the extradition of terrorists, whether through diplomatic channels or by the ministries of justice in the concerned countries. Signatories should also cooperate in judicial procedures, inspections, investigations, the exchange of legal exhibits and the protection of witnesses.

El-Nasr was quoted as saying the treaty is in line with the principles of international law, the UN Charter and all international conventions on fighting terrorism.

On the fringe of the extraordinary meeting, El-Adli held talks with several Arab interior ministers on means of enhancing cooperation between Arab security bodies to combat crimes threatening Arab security.

Al-Salem, secretary-general of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, said, in an interview with **Amira Ibrahim**, that "we must distinguish between terrorism and Islam. Terrorist attacks in some Arab countries are carried out by persons who are not related to Islam in any way." He also said that a distinction should be drawn between terrorism and extremism.

Al-Salem asserted that there is no evidence or proof that any Arab country was involved in exporting terrorism to another Arab country. "Why do we only mention Arab terrorism?" he asked. "Why not mention those Western countries, such as Britain and the United States, which provide terrorists with shelter in the name of human rights and freedom? The whole world should cooperate because we are all involved."

Al-Salem said the treaty focuses on the use of Western countries by terrorists for fund-raising, recruitment, propaganda and weapons procurement as a primary threat to Arab security. "Now that the accord has become reality, it is time to move strongly and firmly to persuade those [Western] governments to combat terrorism. Certainly, they are going to suffer and turn into victims as we are now."

Asked about the US categorising some Arab countries as sponsors of terrorism, Al-Salem responded: "The Arab states reject terrorism in all its forms and regardless of its source. We know that there is a significant difference between their definition of terrorism and ours — and this a serious obstacle in the way of holding an international conference on fighting terrorism."

Al-Salem pointed out that the treaty draws a distinction between terrorism and "the people's right to fight foreign occupation and aggression in order to achieve their right to self-determination and independence."

"What the US considers to be terrorism we regard as heroic action that should be promoted and supported," he said.

Egypt and Sudan inch closer

What is your assessment of the Arab Treaty for Combating Terrorism and what are the means of guaranteeing its effective implementation?

In Sudan, we view the treaty as a very good step towards achieving cooperation in fighting terrorism in the Arab world. We have full support for the treaty and are keen on implementing it, every word of it.

The treaty is a comprehensive one, covering all aspects related to terrorism. This formula was agreed by all Arab countries, so we expect that all Arab countries will abide by the provisions of the treaty.

Most of the Arab countries which suffer from terrorism became convinced that such a phenomenon needs a decisive confrontation; otherwise, it will threaten the security of Arab citizens and lead to tension in inter-Arab relations. Consequently, they will cooperate seriously in turning the treaty into reality. I believe the treaty will serve to build up confidence between Arab countries and restore [any] relations [that may have soured] to normal.

You had a meeting on Monday with Interior Minister Habib El-Adli. What was the content of your discussions?

The talks dealt with promoting security cooperation between the two countries. We discussed the possibility of exchanging visits by security officials from the two countries and of expanding the field of technical training.

The talks also dealt with the proposed security agreement between Egypt and Sudan. The agreement, recently proposed by Sudan, got the preliminary approval of the Egyptian minister. However, it will be subject to a thorough study by the concerned authorities in Egypt.

We have not fixed a date yet for signing, but I am sure this will be done as soon as possible. The agreement lays down guidelines for combating crimes and facilitates the regulations of issuing entry visas between the two countries.

Has the Egyptian-Sudanese security file been closed? Wouldn't this be a step toward restoring relations to normal?

All the security issues which previously caused tension in bilateral relations are now being addressed by Egyptian security authorities in cooperation with Sudanese security authorities. I am sure that they will reach very good results and overcome all security problems.

Problems between two brotherly countries like Egypt and Sudan are minor ones which can be solved easily. Clear directives were issued by the Egyptian and Sudanese presidents to remove all the causes of tension between the two countries.

I think that reaching an agreement between the two interior ministries will pave the way for strengthening relations between Egypt and Sudan.

Did Sudan provide Egypt with information about the Egyptian terrorists suspected of involvement in the failed attempt on President Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa in 1995?

Security authorities in Sudan are very cooperative and we are satisfied with the efforts they made in this connection. Yet, it is better not to talk about this subject.

An Egyptian delegation is visiting Khartoum at present to take possession of the Egyptian property which had been confiscated earlier. What are the results of the visit?

Very good steps have been taken towards restoring the Egyptian property. As far as I know, Egypt will take back most of its property and will be compensated for any property that was lost, damaged or destroyed.

There have been reports of an imminent visit by President Omar Al-Bashir, but it never materialised. What is the reason?

There are certain internal circumstances in Sudan which delayed the visit. Anyway, we expect that the visit will take place very soon. It will help put an end to all the issues between the two countries and pave the way for strong mutual relations.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



Obituary

Abdel-Ghani Abul-Enein: brush, paper and pencil

The death of a landmark journalist and artist leaves both professions a little poorer. **Hani Mustafa** remembers

Those who knew Abdel-Ghani Abul-Enein will immediately recall the contemplation and tranquillity connected with the man. He was a very calm and serene person, who listened much, but spoke only when necessary. However, if any person near him could engage him in a dialogue, he would enjoy the liveliest and most intelligent conversations, and sometimes the most ironic. He was a charismatic and charming person. For a younger man to become close to him, would be to feel as a son.

His journalistic debut followed his graduation in 1950. He came top of his class in the interior decorating section of the School of Fine Arts — now part of Helwan University. He started working for *Rose El-Youssef* magazine as a copy editor, at a time when the post of layout editor was unknown. His job was initially to review the compiled material, then summarise it. Page layout was the responsibility of the print press technician. But with Abul-Enein's appointment, the post of layout editor was created — a post he made his own thanks to his aesthetic creativity.

When Fatma El-Youssef decided to publish a new periodical catering to the needs of the younger generation, she entrusted Abul-Enein with the role of artistic editor, making his dear friend, the late Ahmed Bahaaeddin, chief editor. That magazine, *Sabah El-Kheir*, became a kind of independent school which combined the practice of art and the trade of journalism. For a number of artists and illustrators the periodical served as a launching pad for their work, while they learned the art of visual editing at the hands of Abul-Enein, and from the late journalist Hassan Fouad. The period was a melting pot for Egyptian journalism, its works embellished by great artists such as Jahin, Bahgory, Hegazy and Bahgat Osman. *Sabah El-Kheir* was not the only paper for which Abul-Enein designed the basic layout formula: he was also responsible for the design of the monthly *Al-Ghad* magazine, which he had established jointly with Hassan Fouad, and for *Al-Ahali* newspaper in its early days.

One of the most brilliant sections of *Sabah El-Kheir* magazine was entitled, "Half Your Life at Home". Edited and illustrated by Abul-Enein, it aimed to help young people by explaining how to manufacture beautiful small items of furniture. From the moment the visitor set foot in Abul-Enein's home, he or she realised that it has been furnished by the artist himself, with the help of his wife, journalist Re'aya El-Nimr. All the pieces were hand-made to his own designs. No corner of the house was neglected, but all were fitted with furniture in Arabic and classic European styles. His living space was also a permanent exhibition, the walls hardly visible for the many exquisite paintings that covered them from top to bottom.

Abul-Enein was an artist of the encylopaedic type. He was infatuated with folk art, especially traditional garments and architecture. Most of his paintings contain such elements in abundance. In the early 1960s came perhaps the most demanding and difficult challenge he ever had to face, when he was nominated head of the Folklore Arts Centre. He had to choose between journalism and the *Rose El-Youssef* family and the art which was closest to his heart.

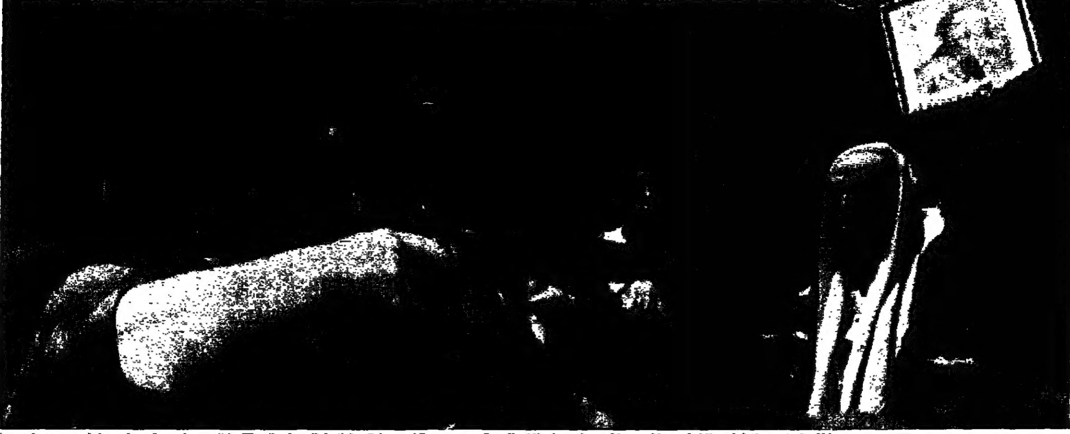
Art won. Henceforth he was able to travel all over Egypt, collecting vernacular artifacts. One of his most important trips was made in the company of the renowned architect Hassan Fathy — to record the appearance of the Nubian village houses before they were submerged by the construction of the High Dam. He returned with projection drawings of 18 homes in various areas — from Darau to Adendan near Wady Halfa. Later, after the National Troupe for Folkloric Arts had been formed, it was Abul-Enein who designed their wardrobe.

He also made several important contributions to the theatre. He was the first native-born set designer to work in the Egyptian theatre at a time when foreigners, especially Italians, monopolised the field. In 1957 he designed the set for the first production of Lotfy El-Kholi's *Qahwat Al-Molook* (Kings' Cafe). He followed this with sets for No'man Ashour's *Sima Awanta* (Hoax Cinema) and in 1964, he worked on the musical show, *Wedad El-Ghaziya* (Wedad the Dancer) for the Musical Show Troupe. His involvement in the cinema was limited, however, to designing the wardrobe for the film *Al-Qadesseya*, directed by the late Salah Abu Seif.

Abul-Enein once said that he had always hoped to find just one newspaper or periodical that he could live without. He was in thrall to newspapers; however small their distribution, they remained close to his heart. Often I would see him pointing to a newspaper vendor who would respond by handing him a huge bundle containing numerous publications. To the last he kept abreast of all journalistic activities, news and events. During the crisis provoked by the notorious Press Law 93, he used to ask me to recount to him everything that took place in the Syndicate that day, showing all the fondness and enthusiasm of a young reporter.

Abdel-Ghany Abul-Enein was still actively involved in both journalism and artistic work until less than a year ago, when he was diagnosed as having cancer of the lymph glands, and had to undergo chemotherapy in Cairo and Paris. He would not have been able to endure the great pain of those last few months had it not been for the love of his friends, with whom he continued to debate in the same calm and ironic manner as before. But his condition was growing progressively worse from day to day. He died, at the age of 69, in Paris on 15 April. With his death, Egypt has lost one of the central figures of its journalistic life, the applied arts and the theatre — a man who enriched everything he touched.

A new generation of Palestinians living in the areas occupied in 1948 are fighting Israeli land confiscation. But their resistance involves more than just throwing rocks at soldiers. **Graham Usher** writes from Jerusalem



As tension mounted throughout Jerusalem and the West Bank on Palestinian Prisoners' Day, a young Israeli soldier is confronted by an old man holding aloft the portrait of his son (photo: AFP)

Fighting back with hammers and nails

Last weekend, a delegation of Palestinian leaders from inside Israel visited Um Sahili — a tiny Palestinian village set amid the lush, rolling hills of the lower Galilee. Led by Israeli Knesset member (MK) Hashem Mohamed from the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE), the delegation brought food and bedding to the village — a gesture of solidarity for the 40 of the village's 90 Palestinian residents who have just been made homeless. The delegation was received in a wooden wakehouse and served with bitter coffee, but the mood between them and the villagers was not funeral. On the contrary, it was triumphant.

Um Sahili is defined by the Israeli authorities as an "unrecognised" village, one of 40 or so Palestinian communities in the Galilee that enjoy this dubious status. Since Israel officially does not recognise the existence of such villages, it feels no obligation to provide them with municipal services or even with basic infrastructure like water and electricity. Yet "recognised" or not, the Sawaad family has lived in Um Sahili for close on 40 years, with the last of its six stone houses built 23 years ago.

In 1993, Israel's Land Authority issued demolition orders for the houses on the grounds that Um Sahili was built on "state land" required for Adi — a Jewish settlement built ten years ago that now encroaches Um Sahili in a pincer-like grip. When the Sawaad family appealed the order in the courts, one judge upheld the destruction of three of the houses while another rejected the order for the other three. Since then, discussions have been held between Israel's Northern District commissioner and the mayor of Shafa Amer (a neighbouring Palestinian village), Ibrahim Nimr Hussein, with the hope of saving Um Sahili by annexing it to the Shafa Amer municipality. That was how matters stood — until 2 April.

On that morning, three Israeli bulldozers arrived at the village and, without warning, razed three of the houses. "I was at work at the time," says Asad Sawaad, who owned and lived in one of the houses. "I hurried home, but when I got there I no longer had a home." On 4 April, thousands of Palestinians from all over the Galilee held a protest march from Shafa Amer to Um Sahili, with several hundred youths staying on to rebuild the demolished houses. What happened then was perhaps the worst confrontation between Israel and its Palestinian population since "Land Day" in 1976, when Israeli police shot dead six Palestinian civilians also protesting the confiscation of their land and property.

According to eyewitnesses, at around dusk that night Israeli police encircled Um Sahili and then, without provocation, "went on the rampage", lashing out at women and children and destroying all personal property in the village. In response, Palestinians barricaded themselves in the homes or fought back with stones and makeshift Molotov cocktails. "It was a virtual pogrom by the Israelis," commented one Palestinian from Shafa Amer, "and a mini-Intifada by the Palestinians." By dawn, 24 Palestinians and 20 policemen had been injured and 18 Palestinians arrested. In protest, the Supreme Arab Monitoring Committee (generally viewed as the most "representative" Palestinian organisation in Israel) called for a general strike throughout the Arab sector on 7 April over "the brutal attack by the police and border patrol against Um Sahili and Shafa Amer".

The strike was solidly observed, especially among Palestinians in the Galilee, despite falling on the eve of the Muslim feast of *Eid Al-Adha*. The reason, according to Ibrahim Nimr Hussein, was less the violence of the police than the issue at the core of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, be they living in Israel or in the Occupied Territories. "The struggle is to defend the land and resist the demolition of houses," he said.

There is nothing new about this struggle in the Galilee, where Israel has long pursued a policy of "Judaisation" — dispersing Jewish settlements throughout the area while concentrating Palestinians ever more tightly into their existing villages. What was new about Um Sahili was the form of Palestinian resistance, which involved not only protest but a concerted effort to stay on the land by rebuilding the demolished houses. What caused the change?

"I think there are two factors," says Hashem Mohamed. "We are aware that the right is growing in strength in Israel, especially among the younger Jewish generation. This generation has been bred in the womb of an Israeli society that is racist. When we feel this racism in conflicts like Um Sahili, there is a polarisation between Arab and Jew which brings a reaction. But this reaction is now led by our Palestinian youth — a generation that is not burdened by the defeats of 1948 or 1967 and which believes that it should enjoy the same rights in Israel as any Jewish citizen. This is why as long as Israel pursues its racist policies in land and other areas there will be confrontation."

It is a fight for which the "new generation" appears ready. In Um Sahili, bulldozers provided by the Shafa Amer municipality clear away rubble as the Sawaad family painstakingly reconstructs their homes and their history. Two of the three demolished houses have already been rebuilt. "I do not think the police will return to destroy the houses," says Mohamed as he watches women and children take down the tents that have been their shelters for the last three weeks. Is this due to new policy? "Yes, but not on the part of the Israeli government. The new policy is in us — the new generation has decided to resist."

A Hashemite touch

King Hussein is once again trying to prove his instrumental role in efforts to break the Palestinian-Israeli deadlock, writes *Al-Ahram Weekly's* special correspondent in Amman

Jordan this week was the focus of a flurry of activities ranging from the visit of British Prime Minister Tony Blair to secret discussions in Amman between Jordanian army officials and US Defence Secretary William Cohen. But the most significant event was King Hussein's two-hour meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu last week in Eilat, five minutes by boat from the Jordanian port of Aqaba.

The meeting was arranged by the new head of the Mossad, Ephraim Halevy, who had earlier managed to use his decades-long friendship with the king to negotiate a deal following the attempted assassination in Amman of Hamas leader Khalid Misha'al last September. The king had earlier asked for Halevy to be appointed as the first accredited Israeli ambassador in Amman.

A well-informed Jordanian source, who asked not to be identified, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that King Hussein was eager to play a role similar to the one he had in the Hebron accord two years ago when he travelled to Gaza and Jerusalem to persuade both sides to accept his proposals.

The source added that it took Hussein two long telephone calls with President Bill Clinton to hammer out the details of a new American plan that US Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross will be carrying to the area on Friday. The Hussein-Netanyahu meeting was meant to be kept secret, but the media got wind of it. Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul-Salam Majali said that Netanyahu was "alerted" to the consequences and "warned" about what would result if all sides refused the new blueprint that Ross is carrying.

The new American plan calls for a May peace conference to be hosted by the United Kingdom and attended by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The plan also proposes a 13 per cent military pullback from the area under Israeli occupation, while Israel is willing to give up only 9 per cent.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel have been at loggerheads for the past few months over the scope of the Israeli army withdrawal. Jordanian Foreign Minister Jawad Anani said that Hussein phoned Arafat and asked for his support of the Ross mission. Furthermore, the king calmed Arafat's fears regarding Israel's proposed withdrawal from Lebanon and assured him that it would not jeopardise the Palestinian track. Israel's recent acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 425 was interpreted by Palestinian sources as putting their issue on the back burner.

The king's rendezvous with Netanyahu, the anonymous source said, emphasised that the peace process is still "alive" and that a further thaw in relations between Jordan and Israel has been achieved.

This meeting was a culmination of intensive covert contacts which started in London last November between the king and Netanyahu, and was followed by the king's brother, Prince Hassan, taking a large parliamentary delegation to Israel to return a visit to Amman by Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon.

Coming clean in Algeria

Algeria is finally disclosing information on violations committed by self-defence militias backed and armed by the government. **Amira Howeidy** reports

Quoting Justice Ministry officials last Sunday, Algeria's local newspapers reported that the authorities had arrested 120 policemen and members of defence groups on charges of human rights abuses. The suspects, accused of killing, abuse of power, theft and corruption, were being held in Serkadji high security prison in Algiers awaiting trial. Moreover, the newspapers said the ministry had recorded 10 cases of "extra-judicial executions", seven of them carried out inside police stations.

But Algeria's worst "political and security scandal" as dubbed by the press, is not news to many observers and human rights activists. Moustafa Bouchachi, a prominent Algerian lawyer, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the authorities were aware of the violations committed by these groups a long time ago and that many of them had been secretly tried early last year. "You cannot eliminate violence [practised by terrorist groups] by arming civilians because all you get in the end is a larger circle of violence," Bouchachi said. "On the other hand, how can a political problem be solved by giving out machine guns to unemployed people under the pretext of self-defence?" he asked.

The militias were formed following the outbreak of violence in 1992 when the army cancelled parliamentary elections the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win. At that time, state-run television referred to members of the militias as heroes. The aim of arming civilians, officials said, was to help protect villages from attacks by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which the government blames for brutal massacres of civilians over the past six years.

Selima Ghazali, former editor of *La Nation* newspaper, recalls that militia members "appeared in various TV shows and were portrayed as the protectors of the people. It was easy for the press to contact and interview them. But gradually, as the violence escalated, there was no mention of them anywhere." And when *La Nation* published a story on them last summer, highlighting the violations committed by some of them, the issue was confiscated.

The concept of arming civilians in Algeria dates back to French occupation, when the then underground National Liberation Front (FLN) launched the liberation war in 1954. The war's Mujahedeen, or fighters, who succeeded in evicting the French after 130 years of occupation, remained Algeria's symbol of patriotism. After Algeria was declared a republic in 1962, tens of thousands of Mujahedeen received pensions for life from the government in recognition of their patriotic roles. "But the armed militias of the 1990s are not the Mujahedeen of the '50s as the official media portrayed them," Ghazali said. "It was through adopting this kind of discourse that their formation a few years ago went unchallenged," he added.

There are no official statistics on the exact number of armed civilians, but most estimates put the figure at 200,000. According to the Algerian press, the scandal involved members of the ruling National Democratic Rally (RND), whose secretary-general is Algeria's current prime minister, Ahmed Ouyehia. The French-language *Liberté* said that the leading figure in the recent arrests is the mayor of Relizane, (240 kilometres southwest of Algiers) Hajj Forkan, who heads the province's self-defence group. Eyewitnesses interviewed by the paper said that two mass graves were discovered recently in Relizane. They said one contained 17 bodies of civilians who had been killed and dumped in a well. Sixty-two unidentified bodies were also dug up in the same area.

Algeria is under pressure from international rights groups which have urged the UN Human Rights Commission to send investigators to probe what they say are widespread abuses in the country. Various reports issued by human rights groups pointed to state complicity in the massacres which has resulted in the death of more than 80,000 people. Last month, Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf rejected demands for international investigations, saying there was no problem with human rights in Algeria. But obviously, there is. The question is, why is the government finally disclosing such abuses?

"They either want to prove their credibility or they want to divert attention away from the army's alleged complicity in some massacres," an Algerian human rights lawyer who demanded anonymity told the *Weekly*. "Nevertheless, we have to realise that all information related to the ongoing violence has to be seen and filtered by the military authorities first. The press can never publish such news unless it is approved by these authorities. So clearly, there is a message they want to send here," the lawyer added.

Former Prime Minister Reda Malek commented, "There is always danger [from the armed militias], but it has to be accepted." He maintained that "arming civilians is a necessity in the framework of self-defence."

Breaking out of dual containment

The recent exchange of *prisoners of war* between Iraq and Iran is seen as a crucial step towards a long-awaited rapprochement *between the two* countries. **Rasha Saad** probes the prospects

The biggest repatriation of prisoners of war (POWs) since 1990 took place two weeks ago, when Iran and Iraq exchanged thousands of prisoners under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The exchange included 5,584 Iraqi captives and 316 Iranians held in Iraq. The released Iranians included two air force pilots who were the first to be captured after their plane was downed over Baghdad in 1980 shortly after the outbreak of the bitter eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war.

The repatriations took place under an agreement signed by the foreign ministers of the two countries in New York last September. Under the pact, a joint committee was formed to resolve all outstanding war-related issues.

Both Iran and Iraq have attempted to improve bilateral relations several times during the last five years but without much success. The chance of a rapprochement was seen as slim given the history of eight years of bloody war in which about one million people were killed or wounded.

In December, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami met with Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan on the fringes of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Tehran. After three days of talks they agreed to form a special committee to discuss the POWs, trade exchanges, visits by Iranians to holy Shi'ite sites in Iraq and the return of Iraqi planes sent to Tehran for safekeeping during the 1991 Gulf War.

The POW issue, however, has always been a thorny one for the two countries and the source of countless disputes. Iran had previously claimed that there were thousands of Iranian POWs in Iraq, but Baghdad consistently denied such allegations and refused to release the exact number of Iranians held in its prisons.

The recent settlement of the issue is seen by observers as a sign that both countries are serious about wanting to mend fences.

During the war, Iran captured the largest number of POWs. In just one battle, at Basra, it captured about 35,000 Iraqis. However, the exact number of POWs is unknown because the International Red Cross had no office in Tehran or Baghdad during the war.

According to unconfirmed reports, between 13,000 and 15,000 Iraqis were released by Iran during the war. Some of them joined the Shi'ite opposition group, the Higher Council of Islamic Revolution. Most of them married Iranian women and managed to get jobs in Iran. Others joined the Iranian army.

The Iraqi-Iranian joint committee is expected to look into the cases of these Iraqis, allowing those who want to return home to do so, and letting those who choose to settle in Iran.

According to informed sources, the next issue to be addressed between the two countries will be Iranian visits to Shi'ite holy places in Iraq.

Last August, Iraq made a goodwill gesture by inviting Iranians to visit holy sites at Najaf and Karbala' for the first time since the end of the war. However, Iran refused, saying it preferred to hold official talks to resolve the issue. The main obstacle has been that Iraq wants the Iranian visits to be organised while Iran seeks free access to the sites. Some Iranians have visited the sites since Iraq lifted the ban, but they were reportedly Iranians living abroad.

During the past few years, the major obstacle to normalisation has been the lack of confidence between the two countries. Each country accused the other of hostile moves. The existence of Iraqi opposition forces in Iran and vice-versa has always made rapprochement difficult.

Iran hosts a number of Iraqi Shi'ite opposition groups and provides support for the Talibani-led Kurdish group, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

On the other hand, Iraq provides military bases for the Iranian Mujahedeen Khalq opposition group. Iran also still claims $80-100 billion in war reparations which, according to a UN resolution, Iraq has to pay.

Nabil Nejm, Iraq's ambassador to the Arab League, believes that if the major issues which have stymied previous talks are resolved, then eventually relations could improve between the two countries.

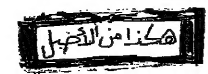
"In dealing with all the obstacles, we are adopting the policy of direct talks," Nejm said. He rejected the notion that such normalisation moves are aimed at sending signals to the US or the Gulf countries. "This is a dialogue between two major neighbouring countries who share a mutual desire for a rapprochement. It has nothing to do with sending any signals."

Both countries, however, share common ground. They oppose the US presence and policy in the Gulf region, and are both targets of the Clinton administration's "dual containment" policy which seeks to keep the two countries diplomatically isolated. The powerful neighbours are both at loggerheads with the rest of the Gulf countries, oppose the current Middle East peace process and the "Zionist enemy" (Israel) and seek to contain Turkish involvement in the Gulf in general and in northern Iraq in particular. Iran and Iraq also oppose the creation of an independent Kurdish state and see an advantage in coordinating their positions inside OPEC.

Tehran has been keen to improve ties with Baghdad as part of the new moderate foreign policy of Khatami. Tehran was against a US military strike against Baghdad during the latest crisis over UN weapons inspection teams, and is believed to have helped smuggle large quantities of oil worth billions of dollars out of Iraq in recent years.

According to Egyptian writer Fahmi Howeidi, an expert on Iran, the rapprochement between Iran and Iraq and the recent improvement in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are positive steps initiated by the Tehran government, providing a chance to ease tensions in the Gulf region. The latest moves, Howeidi said, "have broken all the chains of siege imposed by the US and proved the failure of Washington's dual containment policy."

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**



Another round for Khatami

Iranian President Mohamed Khatami made a big impression last week by gaining an order from the leader of the Islamic revolution to free Tehran's mayor from jail, **Safa Haeri** writes

Tehran Mayor Gholam-Hussein Karabaschi was imprisoned earlier this month by an Islamic judge acting under orders from Ayatollah Mohamed Yazdi, chief of the judiciary, himself a personal friend and associate of the Supreme Guide of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

According to Iranian law, the mayor, who is accused of embezzlement, plundering of public funds, corruption and abuse of power, should have spent a full month behind bars without any possibility of parole, even if bail was paid. But the personal order from the leader of the Islamic Revolution was enough to overturn the sentence.

Unabated pressure from Khatami, behind the scenes manoeuvering from former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, huge support from the public, press and intelligentsia forced Khamenei to yield. The chief of the judiciary, Ayatollah Yazdi, was the first victim of this fierce, almost fratricidal confrontation between the left and right wings of the ruling class of clergymen in Iran.

In fact, the surprise imprisonment of the popular Karabaschi, 45, created the worst internal crisis the Islamic Republic has faced in its 19 years. A conservative judiciary toughed it out with the executive, headed by a moderate president, until Khamenei was forced to intervene personally to prevent the situation from getting out of control.

Commanders of the Pasdarans and Basij forces (revolutionary guards and militia) had warned Khamenei that public support for Khatami and Karabaschi was so strong that it could turn into a massive protest movement against the regime itself. There was also the possibility of some militias joining the protesters, as soldiers did in the last days of the 1979 Revolution.

For this reason, it was decided not to mark *Eid Al-Adha*, the feast at the end of the pilgrimage, which usually serves Khamenei as an occasion for one of his anti-American, anti-Western diatribes.

"The order to free Karabaschi was given by Khamenei, but the main role was played by the people who, in a national upsurge in defence of the mayor, strengthened the position of the president vis-à-vis the defeated conservatives," said Said Leylaz, a journalist in Tehran.

From the outset, Karabaschi's arrest was seen as a political move by the conservatives aimed at the very person of the president, whose landslide victory in last year's election, made possible partly by the financial and logistical help of Karabaschi and the group known as the "Servants of Reconstruction", ended the monopoly of the conservatives over all aspect of political life.

"This is a great defeat for the judiciary and its chief, Ayatollah Yazdi, who had personally provoked the crisis by ordering the arrest," said Sadeq Saba, a veteran commentator on Iranian affairs.

"There is no doubt that the big winner here is Khatami, who personally urged Khamenei to free Karabaschi or face the consequences. His popularity will now rise among the people who see that he has stood firm against the ruling and the now defeated conservatives."

What is most damaging to Ayatollah Yazdi is that he had insisted that the judiciary takes orders from no-one and that judges acted independently without being influenced by political forces. Yazdi also alleged that his administration had ample evidence to convict Karabaschi.

Khamenei's decision was taken after anti-Karabaschi thugs, backed by law enforcement units, clashed last week with up to 3,000 students who, despite requests by the president, were demonstrating in support of the mayor.

Originally, the Office of Students Solidarity planned mass demonstrations in support of both the president and the mayor, but it was called off after Khatami personally asked them to postpone it. "Khatami's decision was very wise. He was afraid to see the defeated and humiliated conservatives — once again trounced by the public's unexpected massive support for Karabaschi — turn the demonstration into violent clashes and put the blame on the government," said an informed official.

In his speech to commanders and political leaders, Khamenei defended the actions of the executive and the judiciary, calling on the people to support their leaders.

Sources in Tehran told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that as the news of the release of Karabaschi was leaked, probably by Rafsanjani, an ad-hoc welcoming committee had been formed to greet him at notorious Evin Prison. In the end, their welcome was called off, although scenes of jubilation were reported in downtown Tehran around the Interior Ministry, the strongest bastion of the mayor. Rafsanjani is considered Karabaschi's main supporter, having introduced him to public life when he was president.

According to eyewitnesses, many cars being driven in the streets of Tehran and some other major cities carried huge portraits of the mayor and Khatami, their drivers blowing horns and congratulating each other over what people are already calling "a great victory for democracy and civil society," referring to the president's electoral campaign platform. Others, including the capital's local mayors, took flowers to Karabaschi's residence and gave him a hero's welcome.

Khatami has won another battle, but the war is not over. There will be a temporary cease-fire. Newspapers on all sides will praise Khatami's wisdom in handling the crisis. But the basic contradictions between the regime's ruling factions will re-emerge sooner or later, probably followed by more violence.

Qana: Not forgotten, nor forgiven

This week, hundreds of Lebanese remembered the victims of the Israeli shelling of a refugee camp in Qana two years ago. **Zeina Khodr** reports from the site of the massacre

18 April has become a national day of mourning in Lebanon. On that day two years ago, 105 Lebanese civilians, mostly women and children, were killed when Israeli gunners pounded a UN peacekeeping base in the southern village of Qana. The victims included hundreds of refugees who had sought shelter at the base from heavy Israeli bombardment in the operation code-named by Israel "Grapes of Wrath."

Survivors of the massacre, many of whom lost loved ones in the carnage, converged at a mass grave for the victims which stands as a reminder of Israel's brutality.

Mourners united in grief where the victims were laid to rest. It has been two years since the tragedy but time has not helped ease their suffering and survivors are still trying to come to terms with their ordeal.

"Every single day I think about them," Mohamed Balhas, who lost 23 members of his family in the attack, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Don't ever think I will be able to forget. We want Israel to pay for its crime. We will continue fighting against the enemy [Israel]."

Marking the occasion, Lebanese President Elias Al-Hrawi called upon the international community to bring to trial the Israeli officials responsible for the massacre. "Why, 50 years after the Holocaust, is the world trying those responsible while ignoring those who committed the Qana massacre?" Hrawi asked a group of international parliamentarians of Lebanese origin attending a conference in Beirut. "Israel should be tried for its crime against humanity."

Hundreds jammed the grave site during a commemoration ceremony. Church bells tolled and verses of the Qur'an blared from loudspeakers. Black banners were raised while graves were covered with flowers and portraits of the victims, whom people call "Lebanon's martyrs."

Women wailed. "I hope they [the Israelis] suffer the way they made us suffer," screamed *Umm* Mohamed, who lost her daughter in the attack. "They should taste what they made us taste," she said.

Leila Atweh lost 18 members of her family. Asked how she is coping, Leila takes a deep breath and sighs. "I live in pain. I will never forget that day." Leila told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that what happened in Qana would remain with her for the rest of her life. "I feel as though I can never smile again."

Mohamed Jaafar, who was looking after the refugees at the base, said the memories have never gone. "Time is not helping. I can still see those scenes; they were horrifying," he said. "I know some people who saw the massacre are still unable to eat meat. Children are also affected. They wake up at night screaming. They always have nightmares."

"We were all together at the camp," Naila Borji says. "We thought we were safe from Israeli bombardment. Then the bombing started. It was so close the shells started to pour down like rain." Borji, like other survivors, sits down beside her family's tombstones every day, reciting verses from the Qur'an.

The commander of the Fijian battalion serving under the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Lt. Col. Filipo Tarakinikini, laid a wreath at a grave site. He said he hoped the blood of the victims was not spilt in vain and that peace would come soon.

"It was a terrible tragedy and I feel for the victims' families," Tarakinikini told the *Weekly*. "I hope their souls rest in peace. Time has not diminished the suffering of the people."

The base still has shrapnel marks and the site of the massacre has been sealed off. Only two Fijian soldiers who were serving with the battalion at the time of the attack remain in the south. The others have returned home. Major Mitieli Viniasi was the battalion's medical officer. He recalled the difficulties he faced as he treated the wounded. "It was horrible. People were badly injured. Some could not find their limbs," he said. "Do not forget that we have close ties with the people of Qana. We practically live with them and this is our second home."

The carnage at Qana has made the possibility of peace with Israel remote. There is hatred and hostility towards Israel, particularly across south Lebanon. "I am ready to die fighting Israel," said Mohamed Salameh, a resident of a village in south Lebanon who took part in mourning the Qana victims.

"I want my children to grow up to hate them [the Israelis]," said Mohamed Moussawi, another southern Lebanese. "They and my grandchildren should continue the resistance struggle."

Raafat Taki, a 19-year-old survivor of the massacre, lost his father and sister. "How do you expect us to make peace with the Israelis?" he said. "Every one in the south has lost somebody they care for because of Israel. Do you think they will ever welcome peace with Israel? No Israeli tourist will be allowed to step on our land."

The Qana massacre was one of the bloodiest attacks ever staged against Lebanon. Israel claimed the bombing was a mistake, but the UN concluded it was unlikely to have been the result of an error. It has been two years since the attack, but southern Lebanese and the country as a whole have still not forgotten the tragedy. And no matter how much time may pass, they are unlikely to forget or forgive.



A young Lebanese sits on the mass grave of the 105 Lebanese civilians killed in the Israeli bombardment of a UN peacekeeping position in Qana on 18 April 1996. The boy hides his tears after placing flowers for his two playground friends who perished along with their mother *(photo: AFP)*

Hopes for a Lockerbie breakthrough

Representatives of families of British victims of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing have presented a new proposal in the hope of resolving the dispute, **Rasha Saad** reports

Amid intense Arab efforts to end the six-year-old air and arms embargo against Tripoli, Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid met last week with British representatives of the families of victims of the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 271 people. The United States and Britain claimed the bombing was carried out by two Libyan intelligence agents and pushed the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against Libya in April 1992 for refusing to hand them over for trial in either the US or Britain.

Jim Swire, whose daughter was among the 35 British victims, and Robert Black, a professor of Scottish law, told reporters they discussed with Abdel-Meguid details of a new proposal which, said Swire, "was a modification of a previous one in the hope of making it more acceptable to the UK." However, they declined to explain the nature of the proposal.

In another indication that the British families were serious in seeking a settlement, Swire and Black went to Libya on Saturday where they discussed their proposal with Libyan Justice Minister Mohamed Al-Zuwiy and other top Libyan officials. They did not meet with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Black had previously proposed that a trial can be held in a neutral country, under Scottish law, and before a panel of international judges rather than a jury, as Scottish law stipulates. But the proposal has been rejected by the US and Britain. The two countries have also rejected suggestions that a trial be held at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague or that a special court to hear the case be established.

Abdel-Meguid described Wednesday's discussions as "important and in-depth," adding that the visit of the two representatives "shows mutual concern to reach justice and truth." He said he had personally contacted Libyan officials to prepare for Swire's and Black's visit to Tripoli. Swire expressed cautious optimism that his proposal could move forward after his meetings in Libya.

This new attempt to resolve the Lockerbie issue is, according to Black, also motivated by the fear that the families of the American victims may seek a civil trial rather than a criminal one. If evidence in a case is used in a civil trial it cannot be used again should there be a criminal trial, he said.

"There are moves in the US to hold a civil trial charging the government of Libya," Black said. If the trial was to produce evidence in court, that would make any criminal trial practically impossible. We want to avoid the contamination of the evidence in this case," he said.

Black is also against a civil trial in the US because "no one will believe that an American civil court, presided over by an American judge, with a jury of American citizens, and in all probability without Libyan lawyers defending the accused, would give a just verdict."

The families of the US victims have taken a stricter stand than the British families. They support Washington's position that the trial must be held in either the US or Britain.

Black hopes to start criminal proceedings — which is part of his proposal — before the Americans take the case to a civil court.

Swire and Black also met with British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook earlier this month. They were told that there were some new diplomatic initiatives but did not elaborate. Swire said that during the meeting, Cook did not give them a clear-cut idea of what the British government proposed to do to solve the dispute, but he did quote Cook as saying that no channels were closed and that every option was still open.

Swire criticised the fact that Cook has not been well briefed on the issue. "Towards the end of last year, Cook told the UN that it would be impossible to move a Scottish jury to a neutral country," Swire said, explaining that Black's proposal did not include a jury at all. He added that Cook was also unsure of who Ibrahim Legwell (Libyan lawyer for the two suspects) was. Swire, however, excused Cook for his lack of knowledge on the subject. "He represents a government that came to power long after the present deadlock was reached by the previous government. That's why he bears no responsibility for the situation he has found himself in," Swire said.

Swire and Black remain hopeful of a breakthrough, especially after the ruling in February by the ICJ that it had the right to judge the Lockerbie issue. US President Bill Clinton's administration has insisted that the Security Council was the only party authorised to examine the case and determine when sanctions will be lifted.

Black praised the political pressure generated by South African President Nelson Mandela's involvement last October and encouraged similar moves. He said Mandela's involvement "was the most important thing that has happened in the issue in six years. It shook the British government."

Black believes that if his modified proposal is rejected, it will be the end of his role. "I am tired of formulating reasonable schemes that are, nonetheless, rejected."

Sudanese war drums beat louder

Child soldiers tell of horrors as Sudan braces for an escalation of the country's civil war, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

The death of 260 young Sudanese army conscripts who perished earlier this month near a military training camp south of Khartoum has highlighted the plight of students called up for compulsory military service in the war-torn country.

According to eyewitnesses and Sudanese opposition parties, at least 160 conscripts were gunned down by their guards, while the rest sank in the River Nile in a small fishing boat as they were trying to make their getaway amid army shelling. The incident took place on 2 April, only four days before the beginning of the Muslim religious feast *Eid Al-Adha*.

Farouk Abu Eissa, head of the Cairo-based Arab Lawyers Federation and leading spokesman for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the opposition umbrella group struggling to oust the Sudanese regime, said that *Eid Al-Adha's* religious message of forgiveness was ruthlessly violated by some two dozen Sudanese government soldiers who where guarding conscript camps.

"The ears of the ruling National Islamic Front's (NIF) soldiers reverberated to other drums and they behaved as if they had returned to the ways of the jungle," Abu Eissa told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. The NIF is headed by Sudanese Parliament Speaker Hassan Al-Turabi, a close ally of Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir. "Revenge, hatred and exacting cruel punishment devoured their energies," Abu Eissa added.

The youngsters, aged between 14 and 17, were housed in two camps — Al-Eilafun and Al-Seleet — which between them were home to over 2,500 students. Half of these students managed to escape. One arrived in Cairo last week and told the *Weekly* about his ordeal.

"We wanted to spend the *eid* with our family and friends, but we were refused permission by the authorities," said Ibrahim Hamid Abdallah Khalil, a 19-year-old student who fled Al-Seleet camp, then took a train from Khartoum to Wadi Halfa from where he boarded a ship to Aswan.

"When we demonstrated they threatened to adopt a shoot-to-kill policy. Then they shot at us; many students were killed in cold blood. The footpaths in the forest leading out of the camps were strewn with bullet-ridden bodies of youngsters. We first fled from Al-Eilafun camp to Al-Seleet camp," Khalil said. "I had the proper travel documents and those at the immigration checkpoints who support opposition forces helped me to leave the country. At the Egyptian border, I was initially interrogated and I thought that I would not be allowed to enter the country. But when I explained my predicament to the Egyptian authorities and told them that I faced a possible death sentence for desertion from the army and treachery, they let me in," Khalil said.

According to Abu Eissa, the Sudanese government faces a daunting task. With increasing defections, the government needs to set up a larger army and can only do so by force. "It is a vicious circle of violence," Abu Eissa added.

The Sudanese army, by its own account, needs at least 56,000 more infantrymen in the escalating war against armed opposition groups in remote areas of Africa's largest country. The southern, eastern and western war zones have proved to be mass graveyards for poorly-trained teenage army conscripts, hastily sent to the front line.

The Sudanese government resorted to enforced conscription of school children as the death toll of government troops rose and an ever-increasing number of Sudanese government soldiers, especially southerners, defected to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and other armed opposition groups.

The policy of enlisting school pupils into the army before they go on to university was signed into law last year by Bashir. The children must enlist in the national service for two years.

Both Muslims and Christians, northerners and southerners, are subject to compulsory conscription. Youths are being dragged out of buses and other public places and bundled into lorries to be taken for military training without the knowledge of their parents.

"Boy conscripts have tried to come to terms with the cataclysm, but there are no easy choices. The only way to ensure a job after what little schooling they have, is to prove that they survived the civil war and fought in the *jihad* against the communist and southern infidels," Abu Eissa said.

SPLA leader John Garang told the *Weekly* that "child soldiers are used as human shields and cannon fodder in religious wars against the people of southern Sudan, in the Nuba Mountain in western Sudan, in the upper Blue Nile province and parts of eastern Sudan."

Even the tightly-controlled Sudanese papers this week continued their criticism of the government's statements on the killing of the students. It took Sudan's Compulsory National Service Administration three days to draft a two-sentence statement to break the news to the nation. The Defense Ministry has now formed a committee to investigate the circumstances that led to the shooting, while parliament has announced that it will send a fact-finding mission to Al-Eilafun which will report back to the deputies on 4 May.

Sudan's Bar Association issued a statement this week urging Bashir to get the facts out to the people. They also appealed to him to reconsider the policy of conscripting school children so that they would not lose their right to an education.

The government, however, is unapologetic about the Al-Eilafun incident. Spokesman of the Compulsory National Service Administration, Kamal Hassan Ali, said in a statement on Saturday that conscription would continue in its present form until the year 2000.

"Our plan is to raise 110,000 conscripts from among students of the universities, institutes and high schools as well as from among young employees in both the public and private sectors," he said.

"We are also planning to introduce compulsory national service for girls in non-military fields," he added.

'The original Cambodian'

A tragic chapter in Cambodia's history came to an end with the death last week of Pol Pot, but the horrors of the past cannot be laid to rest until the West is brought to book, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**



Khmer Rouge guerrillas burn their leader's mortal remains on pry according to Buddhist traditions. Meanwhile, Khmer Rouge guerrillas drove back Cambodian government forces from the mountain stronghold of Anlong Veng near the Thai-Cambodian border. After Pol Pot's death of a cardiac arrest last week, the Khmer Rouge intensified its attacks on villages in central Cambodia *(photo: AFP)*

The West's support for Pol Pot's murderous career cannot be seen dispassionately in the Third World. Viewed from the "majority world", the case is clear: the West should be put on trial for the support it gave Pol Pot and his henchmen. And now that Pol Pot is dead, it is his lieutenants who should be tried for crimes against humanity. Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, one-time tactical ally of the Khmer Rouge, has supported the United States in its recent efforts to bring Pol Pot to book. But why did Washington not start looking for the murderer earlier?

The answer is simple. Only those Western stooges who have outlived their usefulness and are on the verge of death are ever called to account. When the Khmer Rouge were driven out of Cambodia by the Vietnamese in 1979, Washington issued diplomatic passports to key Khmer Rouge officials and backed Thailand which was rendering invaluable rearguard support to Pol Pot's army as it plundered western Cambodia during its retreat. Both the US and Britain, whose SAS special forces provided military training for the Khmer Rouge, schemed against the Vietnamese-backed government of Hun Sen.

The US stepped up its B-52 bombing raids as the Khmer Rouge was tightening the noose around war-torn Cambodia in 1969. American warplanes dropped 540,000 tons of bombs on the Cambodian countryside killing over 100,000 peasants in an attempt to snuff out all pro-Vietnamese and anti-American resistance. Thus the stage was set for Pol Pot's reign of terror. Meanwhile Khmer Rouge pogroms against pro-Vietnamese peasants intensified.

Pol Pot presented himself as the champion of a Khmer national renaissance: a dubious claim, coming from an avowedly Maoist champion of scientific socialism. Yet behind the bland platitudes of propaganda, we find irony, paradox and contradiction. Pol Pot master-minded a revolution that was all too easy to deride in the West. Yet it was the West that made that revolution possible.

Cambodia has had the misfortune of being sandwiched between two powerful rivals — Vietnam to the east and Thailand to the West. The traditional struggle between them for hegemony over their mutual neighbour was transformed into a sinister political game played out by warring Cambodian factions at the height of the Cold War era. Thailand was pro-Western, Vietnam pro-Soviet. Historically, the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh was a foreign enclave that housed the extensive seraglio of the Royal Cambodian Palace and its attendant court, along with French colonial officials, Chinese traders, and Vietnamese workers. The reigning monarch was invariably a French puppet. Native Cambodians were by and large relegated to the rural backwaters. This was the socio-political milieu that Pol Pot grew up in. In the twilight days of French colonialism, he came to view the Vietnamese as the real national enemies of Cambodia and its indigenous Khmer people. China and Thailand, Vietnam's traditional enemies, thus became his staunchest allies.

Saloth Sar, who later assumed the *nom de guerre* Pol Pot — meaning "the original Cambodian" in the Khmer language — came from a privileged background. His family had royal connections: his brother, Loth Suong, was a palace official. One cousin was married to King Monivong and a sister was a royal consort. Pol Pot was thus introduced to the inner workings of the Palace and political intrigue at an early age.

He was one of the few Cambodians of his generation not to have known rural life as a child. After schooling at Phnom Penh's Royal Buddhist monastery, he was sent to a French Catholic school, also in the capital. He then studied radio-electricity in Paris from 1949 to 1952. It was there that his earliest political ideas were nurtured. He joined the French Communist Party and married Khieu Ponnary, the first Cambodian woman to earn a *baccalauréat*. The couple were obviously enthused by French culture and chose Bastille Day for their wedding in 1956.

Pol Pot's subsequent life hardly makes for a heart-warming story. Eight years of guerrilla warfare between 1967 and 1975, hardened the ambitious man who in 1962 had usurped the leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. The party at that time was predominantly in the hands of French-educated anti-Vietnamese militants, heavily influenced by Maoism and who admired the Chinese Cultural Revolution. This was the time of the Sino-Soviet split. It was during this particularly gruesome historical period that Pol Pot first showed signs of his merciless determination to wipe out anyone who stood in his way. He developed the most barbarous means to achieve his desired end: the creation of a model scientifically-socialist nation-state. Already then he was responsible for the death of over 1,000 Vietnamese-trained Communist Cambodians, a chilling prelude to the killing fields of the late 1970s which were to claim the lives of millions.

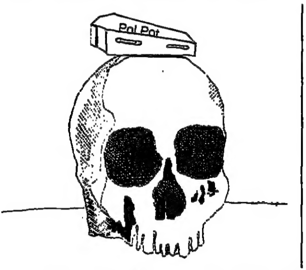
Such schemes of social engineering too often degenerate into mass murder, even genocide. Peasants were forced into unpaid collective labour, a grim reminder of the methods that had been used by the French colonial authorities. Although mainly working under threat of death, the peasants rebelled; yet despite their reluctance, Khmer Rouge leaders managed to maintain the charade of socialist "development" for many years.

Secrecy was the key to the regime's short-lived success. Loth Suong, Pol Pot's brother, only discovered that his kid brother who used to accompany him to the royal palace at the age of six was the man in charge of Cambodia when his portrait was displayed all over the Cambodian capital in 1978. As a prelude to this emergence into the limelight, an estimated 100,000 Cambodians in the eastern region bordering Vietnam had been butchered. To date, 9,000 mass grave sites have been discovered in the region. Cambodian officials and human rights activists suspect that at least a further 11,000 pits remain to be uncovered. Pol Pot's star was rising fast. His first wife went mad.

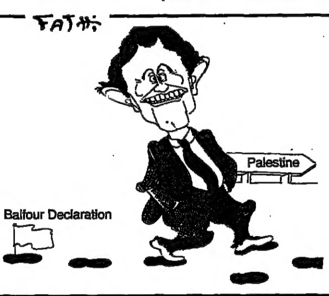
Recently Mea Som, Pol Pot's widow, accompanied by their 14-year-old daughter Mea Sith, talked to the international media at the Thai-Cambodian border. His second wife stood by his side throughout the difficult years after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Ta Mok, a one-legged guerrilla general, deposed Pol Pot in a rebellion last year at Anlong Veng and put him under house arrest. Thousands of Khmer Rouge guerrillas rebelled against Ta Mok last month, but Khmer Rouge radio still broadcasts regularly, a sign that Ta Mok is still in charge. She desperately tried to dispel his image as a hideously fickle tyrant. "He was a good man," his widow told reporters at the Thai-Cambodian border. Mea Som said that she was "afraid for her life," and that he had "left some money to help the family." It was not known whether they would seek political asylum in the West, in Thailand, or simply remain in the jungle of western Cambodia.

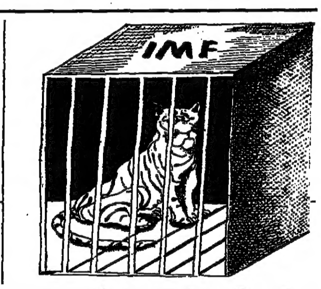
The Khmer Rouge faction in Anlong Veng is the last group still fighting the Cambodian government. Thai intelligence sources insist that Ta Mok still controls a 2,000-man force, but the Cambodian army puts the number at somewhere around 300. The US wanted a full autopsy on the tyrant's corpse, but Pol Pot's remains were unceremoniously cremated last Saturday with no journalists, Buddhist monks or Khmer Rouge leaders present.

Under the Pol Pot regime over 2 million Cambodians perished between 1975 and 1979 through forced labour, disease and systematic executions. Khieu Samphan, Mok Chea, Nuon Chea, Ke Pauk and Ieng Sary, Pol Pot's brother-in-law who defected in 1996, are all now stranded at the Thai-Cambodian border. They remain at large but there are increasing calls for the international community to bring them to book. But who will judge them? The Thais, along with the Chinese and Americans, supported the bloodstained leaders of the Khmer Rouge in the past. Only an international tribunal could have the moral authority to try those Khmer Rouge leaders who are still at large.









Exploiting hunger

Competing political agendas may prevent desperately needed food aid from reaching famine-ravaged North Korea, writes **Faiza Rady**

The first formal negotiations between South and North Korea since 1994 ended abruptly in a deadlock last Friday, with the two sides unwilling to settle points of contention over a fertiliser aid package demanded by the famine-stricken North — the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) — and Seoul's insistence on linking aid to a family reunion plan and the resumption of diplomatic relations. South Korea's senior negotiator, Deputy Unification Minister Jeong Se-hyun, expressed his government's willingness to resume negotiations in the future, but no date has been set.

Although the DPRK readily agrees to the principle of reuniting the estimated 10 million people separated by the 1953 armistice line that marks the division between the Koreas, the North rejects Seoul's politicisation of much-needed aid. Pyongyang's negotiator, Chun Kum-chun, explained that the delivery of fertiliser stocks should be handled as a humanitarian issue, dissociated from conditions and political pre-requisites. Chief negotiator Jon Kum-chol, stressed that the North urgently needed fertiliser in bulk in time for its spring planting season. "Politics must not interfere with this issue," maintained Jon, while Chun derided Seoul's intransigence. "The South's method is: 'We give you a bowl of rice, but you should give us 10 kilograms of beef,'" said Chun, adding that the DPRK was willing to discuss family reunion plans at future talks with Red Cross officials.

Ravaged by last year's drought and two consecutive years of floods that have destroyed some two million tons of grain and damaged 400,000 hectares of crop land, the country's agricultural output is in shambles. Moreover, Pyongyang's lack of funds and inability to import essential fertilisers has further compromised food production. "The stunted growth of maize has been obvious in field trips for some weeks," reported Erich Weingartner, international officer with the World Food Programme (WFP), last summer. "What is less obvious is the overheated water in rice paddies, already weakened by insufficient fertiliser."

In an effort to confront the situation, the DPRK has mobilised its people. "There has been an impressive mobilisation of the citizenry to transplant a great variety of agricultural products. Unfortunately, the input of a tremendous amount of human labour cannot in itself guarantee an adequate harvest. There continues to be a serious lack of fertiliser and pesticides," reported Action by Churches Together, a US-based North Korean aid group.

Expressing a cautious and mitigated degree of optimism, Chun maintained that the DPRK would ultimately survive the current food shortage because of its long-standing national tradition of *juche* or self-reliance. Official optimism notwithstanding, it is evident that Pyongyang is facing a major crisis. By early March, the government had announced that its food supplies would be depleted by the middle of the month, and called for urgent international aid to avoid the risk of widespread famine.

Responding to the state of emergency, WFP Director Catherine Bertini visited the DPRK in early April. "She expressed satisfaction at the fact that food rendered by the WFP and other international organisations and charitable bodies has been supplied to inhabitants... and that the WFP-assisted food-for-work projects have paid off," reported the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Bertini urgently appealed to the international community to donate additional foodstuffs and witnessed the first shipment of the 200,000 tons of food supplied by the US in response to the WFP appeal. But beyond emergency aid, the country also needs international help to restore devastated arable lands and cope with potential flooding in the future. This implies additional aid from the world community for afforestation and embankment.

Although the WFP has worked hard to rally international support for the embattled country, incoming aid has failed to meet requirements. As early as last September, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Director-General Jacques Diouf had warned that a minimum of 1.9 million tons were needed to avert widespread famine in 1998. The WFP has managed to channel only one million tons to the DPRK since last year, falling 900,000 tons short of estimated subsistence needs. "It looks like the international community hesitates to provide aid to a socialist government without considering that innocent people are dying," commented political analyst Isabel Vichniac in the French daily *Le Monde*.

As a result of the international community's failure to provide sufficient grain reserves, it is estimated that millions may have died of hunger in North Korea, while famine is still imminent — threatening especially the isolated and drought-prone northern provinces. Harrowing death tolls vary between one and three million.

"By some estimates, as many as three million North Koreans have died from hunger and millions more are at risk," CNN reported on 11 April, referring to a survey conducted between January and September 1997 by World Vision — an American NGO — indicating that some 15 per cent, or 3.4 million people, of this nation of 23 million had already died from starvation. In a related development, the French NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières, shocked the world last week by claiming that instances of cannibalism were being reported by North Korean refugees crossing into China. "The doctor's report included grisly tales of village roads lined with corpses and hungry parents eating their children," wrote *The New York Times*.

Although widely reported and sensationalised by the Asian media, Bertini did not give these stories much credence. Referring to the WFP's six offices in the DPRK, including an agency located in the region that the refugees in question were from, *The New York Times* quoted Bertini as noting that WFP monitors "have not seen anything like what we've read in the papers. Some food experts believe that the refugees exaggerate problems or report rumours instead of things they have personally witnessed or experienced."

Whether true or false, such horror tales ultimately serve to put into context a people's slow strangulation through hunger and disease. "It is a famine in slow motion," Tun Myatt, a director of transport and logistics for the WFP, said. "People are eating seaweed, cakes made with ground-up tree bark and other 'alternative foods' that have sustained people who otherwise would already have died of hunger."

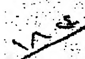
Nationwide, 50 per cent of hospitalised children weigh half the normal weight for their age group. According to health authorities in Changang province, 38 per cent of the children in Huichon City are neither gaining height nor weight, nine per cent suffer from severe weight loss and about two per cent show symptoms of kwashiorkor — a disease characterised by a pot-belly and changes in skin pigmentation — or marasmus, the gradual loss of flesh and strength. Both diseases are caused by severe malnutrition.

Despite their exhaustion, many observers have praised the discipline and hard work of North Koreans, a feature of the socialist work ethic and a result of their rigorous training. According to the 1997 CIA Country Report on the DPRK, North Koreans rank among the most educated people worldwide, with an equal literacy rate of 99 per cent for both males and females — a rare achievement. Action by Churches Together commented on the North Koreans' ingenuity in the face of extreme hardship. "As everything in this society, so also the hunt for food is well organised. Counties, farms and factories go on collection outings together. Edible grasses can be seen drying outside county warehouses, later to be milled to supplement flour for the making of noodles and dumplings. Roots and bark are also prepared for consumption, collectively, and distributed through the public distribution system."

Pyongyang believes that both Seoul and Washington use the aid card ultimately to impose their political and economic agendas. Although the US has started delivering 200,000 tons of food aid to the North, this constitutes a mere public relations gesture — a drop in the ocean in relation to the country's real needs. While South Korea clearly links aid to prying open the economy of the North with its vast pool of highly qualified, disciplined and cheap labour, America's long-standing strategy consists of throttling the DPRK through an air-tight economic embargo, in force since 1950.

"Economic sanctions enacted at the time of the Korean War against the DPRK still prohibit all US citizens from doing business with North Koreans, including trade, investment and financial dealings, unless licensed by concerned authorities," explained the KCNA. As in the case of Cuba, Libya and Iraq — what the US terms "rogue" states — the American boycott also means international economic isolation, since Washington threatens other countries with sanctions should they break the terms of the embargo. In this context, and despite occasional token aid, the US bears a heavy responsibility for the present famine in North Korea.





The hour of our going

50 Years of dispossession

On 18 April, the first Arab town — Tiberias — fell into the hands of the Haganah. Four days later, Haifa's Palestinian population had to flee under the Zionists' combined shelling and ground offensives. **Amira Howeidy** recounts the story of their exodus

After capturing Arab villages along the Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem Road, the Haganah started its offensive against Palestinian towns in the second half of April. By the night of 18 April, 6,000 or so Arab inhabitants of Tiberias were fleeing the town, constituting the first batch of a mass Palestinian exodus that would number around 800,000 by the end of the 1948 war.

According to Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, one of the most significant aspects of the fall of Tiberias was the way the British forces handled the situation. Until they were due to withdraw on 15 May at the end of the mandate, it was their duty to maintain security and peace in Palestine. However, the only effort they exerted in this respect while Tiberias was coming under heavy mortar fire, was their "advice" to the commander of the Arab garrison "to stop fighting and evacuate the Arab inhabitants."

Justifying this passive stance, the British military historian Major Wilson said that the British forces were obliged to stick to a certain time schedule for the anticipated withdrawal. By the time the Haganah attacked Tiberias, they were "too weak in numbers", and thus physical intervention was impossible.

The question of British complicity with the Haganah was raised again when a few days later it was Haifa's turn to come under attack. The town was the point of convergence for the British troops who were due to sail away on 15 May. Haifa had a population of 140,000, more than half of whom were Jews. The Jewish quarters were situated high on Mount Karmel, where they dominated the Arab quarters — a factor which would later facilitate the Haganah's offensive. Since the UN partition resolution, fighting between the two parties had become a common aspect of daily life, with continuous sniping, explosions and exchange of fire.

The British troops were in charge of safeguarding the security in the town, and policing the main roads separating the Jewish quarters from the Arab ones. On 1 April, a liaison office was formed between the British army and the local Arab national committee, in response to the orders of General Stockwell, the British commander. Although they initially established good relations, their entente was destined not to last for long.

According to Khalidi, the passive stance of the British troops in Tiberias encouraged the Haganah to push ahead with Operation Misparayim to attack and occupy Haifa. History showed that they had read the signs correctly. On 21 April, the British suddenly evacuated the residential quarters of the town.

At 11.00am, General Stockwell summoned Amin Ezzedien, commander of the Arab garrison, and informed him that he had ordered his troops to withdraw from the areas separating the Arab quarters from the Jewish ones, adding that he would not intervene in any clashes between the two parties. Meanwhile the Haganah were launching their 'general attack' on Haifa with indiscriminate mortar fire. They filled barrels with explosives and rolled them down to the Arab quarters below. The Arabs pleaded repeatedly with the British army to send help, but they were turned down.

In his book, *Half a Century of the Palestinian People's Jihad*, Saleh Masou'd Bouyassir points out that there were 5,000 Jewish combatants in Haifa, well-trained and armed with American weapons and Russian armoured vehicles. The Arabs on the other hand were desperately searching for weapons. They succeeded in buying some with their own money and asked for more from the military committee formed by the Arab League. However, out of 205 machine guns sent by the committee, only 89 turned out to be operational. Moreover Haifa, having been surrounded on four sides with Jewish settlements "with the help of the British forces", was in a difficult situation, says Bouyassir.

The Jewish attack continued through the night of 21 April till the following day. The fighting grew fiercer as "it continued non-stop for 76 hours, in homes and alleyways, sometimes reduced to knives, sticks or hands," Bouyassir records.

As the number of wounded Arabs swelled in parallel with the escalation of the attacks, another plea was made to the British, and was again rejected. A state of chaos prevailed as thousands of terrified Arab women and children rushed towards the port hoping to escape. But as the Arab town was entirely exposed to the Jewish quarters above, the Haganah snipers were able to kill those trying to flee by the dozen. According to Khalidi, 10,000 refugees made it to the port and were placed by the British in boats and ferries which took them north to Acre.

While this was happening, the Arab Higher Committee was meeting with Stockwell, who refused their demand to stop the Jewish attack even as it was literally developing into "a human massacre", or to reconsider the passive British stance. His only suggestion was that the British might "mediate" between the two parties, and he resisted the repeated efforts of the committee to reach a better compromise. In a bid to put an immediate end to the ongoing massacre, the committee's spokesman said the Arabs were ready for a truce, but wanted to know its conditions.

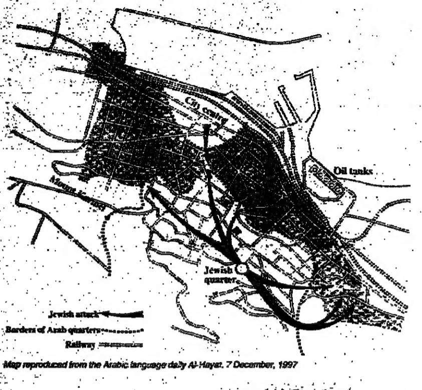
Stockwell immediately excused himself from the room, saying he would contact the Jews. Fifteen minutes later, he was back with a printed copy of a proposed 'truce' — which, as El-Khalidi points out, amounted to an "unconditional surrender". The conditions were: complete disarmament of the Arabs, who were to hand in all their weapons within three hours, the assembly of all "male foreign elements" in a certain location on the condition that they depart Palestine within 24 hours, and finally a curfew. The Arab delegation objected and asked Stockwell to add one more condition, stipulating that signing up to this document would not in any way imply recognition on their part of the leadership of the Haganah or of any change in the political status of the country. The British commander promised to pass this message on to the Jews, but asked the Arabs to meet that afternoon with the Jewish delegation in his presence.

When the meeting took place, the Jews flatly rejected the Arab proviso. The Arab delegation, feeling the need to consult their co-inhabitants, asked for 24 hours' respite to think over the situation, hoping they could use the time to contact the Arab countries. But both the Jews and Stockwell refused, and the latter boldly stated that the Arabs had to sign the truce that evening if they wished to avoid another "300 to 400" casualties among them. Despite strong pressure from the Arabs, Stockwell would not delay the decision until later than 7.00pm that same day.

Once they had left the meeting, the Arab delegation called together most of the men in Haifa to discuss the situation. They agreed to delegate the committee to negotiate on behalf of the Arabs whose priority, at this stage, was simply to prevent the killing of innocent people. However the committee felt it should not force the people of Haifa to recognise the authority of the Haganah, even if this resulted in a political backlash. At the seven o'clock meeting, they refused to sign the truce and asked for help in facilitating the departure of the inhabitants. They then requested that the meeting be delayed until the following day to work out the departure procedures.

On Friday 23 April, all the parties involved met again. The Arab delegation presented a memo addressed to Stockwell, quoting his warning that if the Arabs did not accept the Haganah's provisions, they would endure 300 to 400 more casualties. The memo also pointed out that "despite the fact that the departure [of the Arabs] is our request, the main reason for this remains your refusal to take any action to protect the lives and the properties of the people." But Stockwell refused to receive the memo. The delegation presented another memo during the meeting, which this time was addressed to the Jews. It objected to the continued shooting and killing of Arabs and the looting of their shops, homes and cars, in addition to their detainment by the hundred. Moreover, the memo demanded that every Arab who chose to remain in the city should enjoy full freedom to live and work there. The property of those who departed, it added, should be protected. The Jewish party responded ambiguously. A few days later, they established an 'administration of the enemy's property', thus implying that all of Haifa's Arabs were their enemies. In this way all the Arabs' properties, whether they left or stayed, were subject to sequestration, and those who left could take with them nothing but the simplest personal belongings.

Within a week, only 8,000 Arabs out of an original population of 70,000 were still in the city. The rest were driven out into a diaspora that remains until the present day.



Map reproduced from the Arabic language daily Al-Hayat, 7 December, 1997



Above: Map prepared by Prof. Walid Khalidi showing the direction of the Haganah attacks on Haifa on 21 & 22 April, 1948.

Right: General view of Haifa, Mount Karmel in the background

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Joining the Egyptian game

Jon Corzine, chairman of Goldman, Sachs and Co, in an exclusive interview with **Aziza Sami**, explains why his investment bank is looking to become a 'an active participant' in the Egyptian economy

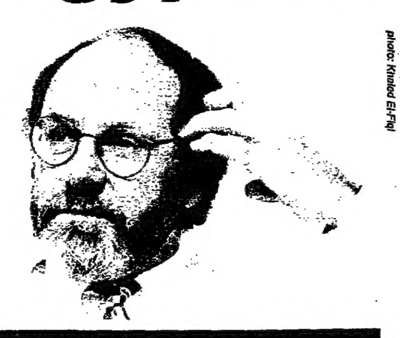


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Goldman, Sachs and Co is a leading Wall Street international investment banking firm with activities in Western Europe, the Americas, and the emerging markets of Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Central Europe. Its operations include mergers, acquisitions and project finance, as well as debt and equity capital markets.

Its Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Jon Corzine is a General Partner of Goldman, Sachs and Co. He is also a member of the National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) Board of Governors, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's International Capital Markets Advisory Committee and the Public Securities Association. In 1997 he was appointed co-chair of the Presidential Committee to study capital budgeting.

He spoke with *Al-Ahram Weekly* during a visit to the region which included Egypt as well as Lebanon, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Goldman Sachs has not had a strong presence in Egypt to date. What brings you here now?

Conditions in the Egyptian economy have changed dramatically over the past decade. As regards the welcoming of outside capital and participants in the Egyptian financial system, things have picked up over the past two or three years. Many of our clients have shown interest in investing in Egypt today in a way that was not possible before.

You see this in telecommunications, in the cellular bids that were extremely well-received by the international community.

If our clients want to be here — we want to be here. There are also important economic clients in Egypt who want to have access to the outside world.

How do you assess the Middle East region, in terms of political risk?

We feel comfortable that there is an openness to the peace process which is fundamental. We may be in a period where things are slower — but in the long run, we believe people in the Middle East will prefer to have economic prosperity which is in everyone's best interest.

It is quite obvious as well that there are points of instability one cannot ignore. We are cautious as to where we want to participate.

That works to Egypt's advantage, because there is a growing sense here of stability and commitment to an open economy where outsiders can participate freely and on a fully equal basis with those in the local economy. I think this will be very advantageous for Egypt over a period of time.

You have no regional headquarters in the Middle East. Why is that?

At this point we have an important securities business in the Middle East. We have been a little lighter on the investment banking franchise. But as liberalisation of these economies occurs, as there is greater stability in the region, which we believe will occur, we may establish physical locations in several places.

How far have you been involved in the market in Egypt?

This is my first visit to Egypt, but we have had a number of our senior people here. We've done transactions and played advisory roles here, and have had long-standing relationships with a number of important industrial and trading groups in Egypt.

But we have not created the depth of activity Goldman Sachs usually does. We want to expand and broaden our efforts to potentially become an active participant in the economy.

What in your view are the restrictions which might face investors looking to move into the Egyptian market?

There are currently a large number of economic units held by the public sector. There is still a lot of privatisation to be done in important areas. Until those units come onstream to the private economy, it makes it harder to do business than if you had a fully-privatised economy.

There is a list of numerous companies to be privatised. That will make it more advantageous for a company like Goldman Sachs to participate than it is now. This is one of the reasons our interest wasn't so deep ten years ago. But it has changed dramatically today.

Which sectors of the Egyptian economy are you interested in doing business with?

Clearly we would have an interest in the telecommunications activity, both as an adviser and a direct investor.

It is significant that the cellular phone offering here was strongly oversubscribed. There are a number of foreign participants, some of them strategic, in the sense that they will bring operating skills. There are also others who are financial participants.

I am sure that we will also be active in the privatisation of insurance units that is under consideration.

We will have a look at how the banking sector involves the private sector over a period of time. We have an interest in the brokerage business as well. We are also looking at real estate investments.

The major infrastructural projects have caught our attention as well, and we're thinking about how we could participate in them, by bringing in outside money or outside participants.

Which mega-projects would you be interested in? Would your participation be a direct investment, and would it be with the private or the public sector?

I'm not in a position to discuss the specifics of what we are going to do. A number of our clients outside Egypt would be interested in those projects.

We have particularly talked with the Egyptian government about the port project along Suez, one that has serious potential for us, whether as an agent or an investor. We also discussed other projects, including airports.

You have met with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Minister of Public Enterprises Atef Ebeid. Have you met with anyone from the private and banking sectors?

We met people from the private sector. We would like to be a partner with some of them who might take a stake in telecommunications, whether it is cellular or core communications.

We like being a direct investor, but until we know the environment here well enough to have confidence as to how to participate, we will work with partners in our direct investments.

What is your assessment of the Egyptian economy?

This trip has reinforced what I have been hearing about the solid nature of the changes that have occurred. You did go through a slow-down after the Luxor incident last fall and the Asian problems, as well as the fall in oil prices. None of these have contributed to strengthening the Egyptian economy, and yet despite that you've done reasonably well.

You have a 4.5 per cent growth rate, and inflation is still at very low levels, after having come down dramatically over the past few years. Given the stresses a number of developing economies have had to face, I think Egypt has done remarkably well in this period.

This means Egypt has a very strong foundation for the future. If this is how well Egypt does in a period of stress, how will it do in a period which is much more benign and supportive?

'Egypt has a very strong foundation for the future. If this is how well Egypt does in a period of stress, how will it do in a period which is much more benign and supportive?'

How do you view the developing capital market in Egypt, and opportunities for investment in it?

To me as a person who sits on the NASD Board of the US, the strategic directions taken by the Egyptian stock exchange make a lot of sense. In execution, policy and strategy, they are on the right track which will lead to more mature markets. The volume is picking up.

Particularly important are the early steps we've heard of by public pension funds who are beginning, in a very small way, to invest in mutual funds participating in the local market.

Is your interest in Egypt as a capital market in any way connected to the recent troubles in Southeast Asia?

There is very little connection. One of our strategic principles is that the more we broaden the areas where we participate, the less dependency we have on any one area. We probably would have had an interest here had Asia happened or not.

There is a debate in Egypt over the speed with which the economy should be opened up at this point in time. Some have called for slowing down the rate at which Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) are issued for basic company shares, saying that this makes the Egyptian economy more vulnerable to the fluctuations of the international market. In your view, how can the dilemma of trying to protect the national economy while at the same time integrating globally be resolved?

The market-place will assess what the credit-worthiness of Egypt is, whether it participates in international bond and equity markets or not. If people can't make transparent judgements, it will restrict the flow of capital to Egypt that can improve the economy.

When you have GDRs, they act as benchmarks in the global marketplace for those who might want to make private investments, or assess the situation. Markets are volatile and changing, whether you have GDRs or not, and you do not have a wealth of those.

Private investments have pulled back after the unfortunate Luxor incident, and the problems in Asia. This would have happened, whether there were GDR issues or not. It's just that the GDRs can measure the volatility because they're out there.

There will be a public sector bank slated for privatisation this year. How do you assess the Egyptian banking sector, and are you interested in any bank privatisations?

I am sure we will examine the potential for that. But it will be complicated because one will not only have the issue of working with the bank which will be privatised, but will also have to project what other banks might be privatised, and in what time-frame.

It depends on the privatisation schedule, whether it will take ten years, or will be done in sequence. You might say one franchise is more interesting than the other, so you have to look at what the franchise sequencing is.

On a personal note, how do you reconcile your financial responsibilities with being on the board of directors of the New Jersey Performing Arts Centre, and a Director of the New York Philharmonic — as well as with your academic commitments?

It is important for leaders of institutions to express an interest in society. It keeps one a little more balanced, and it is fun in some instances.

And frankly, since many of the people I meet at the New Jersey Performing Arts Centre and the New York Philharmonic do business with Goldman Sachs, it makes good business sense.

A long wait and a mixed reaction

The People's Assembly has provisionally approved a new bill which aims to place the public and private sectors on an equal footing when national projects are put out to tender. **Gamal Essam El-Din** and **Niveen Wahish** report

A long-awaited bill entitled "The Regulation of the Bidding and Tender Procedures Law" received a mixed reaction on its recent debut before the People's Assembly. The 43-article bill, topping a list of new economic bills aimed at improving the investment climate in Egypt, aims to bring legislation up to speed with recent developments in project implementation and to eliminate the host of procedures which currently confront public sector agencies and private entrepreneurs when submitting bids and tender offers for national projects.

The bill applies to all state administrative agencies and national service and economic organisations. If it is adopted, such operations as providing services, purchasing equipment, implementing projects, contracting and technical works, and conducting consultancy research will all in the future be put out to tender. However, the system of direct contracting would be permitted for work where the value per operation is in the region of LE100,000 or more, as against the present minimum of LE4,000. The prime minister is also empowered by the bill to sanction specific agencies to resort to the system of direct contracting provided that the value per operation is over LE300,000. The same right will be granted to the ministries of defence and military production.

The objective of direct contracting, according to the bill's explanatory note, is to speed up investment project contracting procedures. Altogether, the bill sanctions four different forms of bidding procedure. These are limited bidding, domestic bidding, limited negotiations and direct contracting. The bill also exempts cooperative societies from paying provisional or final insurance payments provided that the value of a bid or tender offer submitted by one of them for a certain project or service does not exceed LE100,000.

According to Hamed El-Shenawy, MP of Port Said city, the bill, which is an amendment of Law 9 for 1983, is primarily intended to create a transparent system of submitting bids and awarding contracts for national projects. Under the current law, he argued, contracts are awarded mainly according to criteria of cost, regardless of the efficiency of contractors. "This was discriminatory against the private sector because most bids for government projects were thus being awarded to public contracting firms, regardless of how efficient they are," said El-Shenawy.

Mohamed Khalil Adam, an MP for Alexandria, blamed the current bidding law for the collapse of a number of apartment buildings during and after the 1992 earthquake. He was supported by Talaat Mustafa, an MP and contracting tycoon, who claimed that the current system has essentially served to swell government debts to public contracting companies such as the giant Arab Contractors Company.

"These debts stem from the fact that the government found it easier to award projects and services to public contracting firms so as not to be under an obligation to pay for these projects or services on time. The result is that the government now owes arrears of LE15 billion to public contracting firms," said Mustafa.

Mohamed Abul-Enein, MP and chairman of Ceramica Cleopatra Company, also argues that the new bill comes at the right time to open the door for multinational corporations to help implement the new BOT and BOOT projects in Egypt. "The current law is very domestic in nature and falls far short of the requirements of multinational corporations thinking of entering the Egyptian market," said Abul-Enein.

Another group of MPs, however, argued that the bill is still unbalanced in more than one article. According to Mahmoud Hassan, chairman of the Assembly's Housing Committee, the bill says nothing about the fine which should be imposed on administrative agencies if they fail to pay the fees that are due on time. "The bill is clear about the fine to be imposed on contractors but keeps silent about the administrative agency's liabilities. This is dangerous, seeing as the value of the contracting market in Egypt is as much as LE40 billion," said Hassan.

Zakaria Azmi, chief of presidential staff, also spoke against the proposed special exemption for cooperative societies, saying that "this could be considered as unconstitutional."

Two features are of special interest to businessmen: first, the annulling of the article which states that contracts should be awarded to the cheapest offer, provided the specifications are suitable; and second, the provision that tenders should not become a matter for negotiation, with bidders being asked to lower their price. The proposed law also makes it illegal for high officials to give direct orders to select a given bid regardless of the other offers that may be on the table.

According to Adel Selim, in charge of Cairo sales of Mantrac, a company specialising in heavy machinery, the new law should effectively solve the problems that beset the old law. He points out that one major drawback of the current law is the fact that the lowest-priced bid is always chosen regardless of the technical content of the proposal. "This often meant that quality was overlooked," said Selim. "Quality has a price," he warned. Under the new law, it will no longer be the case that the cheapest bid automatically wins.

Selim also said that under the current law, the authorities invite bids, and after receiving the offers, go back to the bidders to renegotiate the price. In this way, the companies are often obliged to drop their prices.

"This was confusing. In presenting a bid, a company should make its lowest offer. But knowing that the price might be up for renegotiation, the company would want to retain a margin, so they would have space to make further concessions."

Under the new law, such bargaining after bids have been submitted will no longer be allowed.

Ayman Mohamed, a small scale manufacturer and installer of laboratory furniture, agrees with Selim on this point: "Under the new law, I can make my best offer knowing that I will not be pressured into lowering it later on."

Mohamed also praised the new law for stressing the importance of quality over price and for granting preferential treatment to products with a higher percentage of local components.

However, Mohamed thinks that the new law will not favour small producers. He explains that under the current law the cheapest offer would win, so long as it matched the minimum specifications required. However, according to Mohamed, under the new law the history of the operations of the bidding company has also to be taken into account. "This means that large suppliers, with more experience and more capacity to produce better quality, will be preferred to small producers who may not have much experience, but who can make a cheaper offer."

Aiming for $1 billion

Egyptian officials and businessmen pushed the country's economic partnership with the US one step further forward last week

FOLLOWING a visit to the US, Minister of Trade Ahmed El-Guweili said that US officials had agreed to extend preferential treatment to a greater number of Egyptian exports to the US. The decision will mean that seven per cent of Egyptian exports to the US will enjoy customs exemptions. Previously, only four percent of Egyptian exports enjoyed the exemption.

A 150-strong Egyptian delegation visited the US to assess recent developments in the Egyptian-American partnership, particularly the setting up of a free-trade zone between the two countries. They also discussed how to increase Egyptian exports to the US to $1 billion by the year 2000.

Egypt's delegation at the two-day talks was headed by Youssef Boutros Ghali, minister of economy, and included Ahmed Guweili, minister of trade and Mohieddin El-Gharib, minister of finance.

During meetings of the joint Egyptian-US committee for economic growth, the American side said it appreciated Egypt's economic reform programme and its positive results. It also said that Washington would continue to support the country's plans to attract more foreign investments. The Egyptian team underlined the importance of cooperation with the US in trade, investment and technology.

US officials said the results of the talks will be submitted to Vice-President Al Gore before his upcoming visit to Cairo, scheduled to start 2 May.

The strategies employed by both countries to improve the environment in Egypt was one of the main issues discussed during subcommittee meetings on sustainable development. The US is to grant Egypt $6 million to help it protect the Nile.

In 1994 President Hosni Mubarak and Gore announced the Partnership for Economic Growth and Development, which strives to promote equitable economic growth and create private sector jobs in Egypt. The partnership also seeks to boost economic ties, focus on private sector trade and investment and establish a dialogue on how to make it easier to do business in both countries.

The partnership, composed of a joint committee set up to study economic growth, includes cabinet members from the two governments. Three subcommittees work alongside the joint committee.

The presidents' council, an advisory body, was established to resolve problems confronting US and Egyptian businessmen. It is primarily a private sector initiative, and has the support of Washington.

The privatisation experts

An Egyptian financial company has beaten global heavyweight competitors to win the mandate to privatise a Jordanian company. **Sherine Abdel-Razek** reports

Head-to-head with nine internationally-known investment banking groups, the Egyptian Financial Group (EFG-Hermes) has come out on top to win a $100 million mandate to act as the lead manager for the privatisation of the Jordan Cement Factory.

With the best technical offer and the second cheapest price, EFG-Hermes came out ahead of big names like Merryl Lynch, Salomon, Smith Barney, CCF and Citibank.

The mandate makes EFG the first-ever Egyptian or Arab financial group to manage a foreign privatisation scheme.

Jordanian officials were quoted by *The Financial Times* as saying that EFG-Hermes' experience in the privatisation of Egyptian cement production gave it a strong lead in technical evaluation, in addition to a highly competitive price. EFG holds a local record in having managed the privatisation of three cement companies.

Hassan Heikal, EFG's executive director, said that offers were assessed on a basis of 60 per cent technical and 40 per cent pricing. EFG's offering was the best in technical terms and the second cheapest.

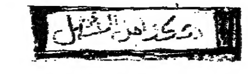
EFG's fees will be 0.4 per cent of the selling price, compared to the French CCF bid of 0.3 per cent. Most of the other bids would have charged more than one per cent.

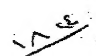
Heikal said that EFG will act as a financial adviser to the Jordanian government. It will help evaluate assets and their selling off either through public subscription on the Amman Stock Exchange or to an anchor investor.

EFG is Egypt's premier investment banking firm with 25 per cent of the market. It has raised LE2.6 billion over the last three years in primary and secondary offerings of Egyptian companies out of which LE1.8 were privatisation transactions. It has acted as financial adviser to the Egyptian government in about 20 major privatisation schemes, including 75 per cent of Medinat Nasr Housing and Development Company and the two offerings of Eastern Tobacco, comprising LE530 million worth of shares. It has also advised on most of the offerings in the cement sector.

Heikal said that EFG is considering regional expansion and that Jordan would constitute a first step: "It is true that we acted as an adviser in the merger between the United Saudi Commercial Bank and Banque du Caire but that was done upon the orders of the client. In Jordan it is different. We planned to go there and bid for the mandate and we won."

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



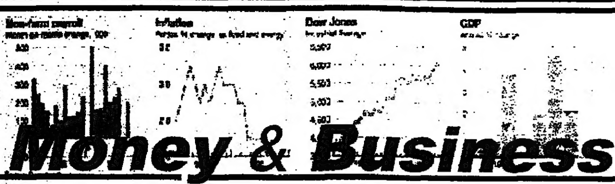


هكذا من الأصل

CACE offering certificate in accounting

DEVELOPING human resources in the fields of management and accounting and financing is a basic necessity to hasten economic transformation and increase the level of foreign capital to Egypt and realise growth in national production.

To develop the skills needed by persons working in these fields, the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education at the American University in Cairo is now offering an advanced accounting certificate that will give students the advanced skills they need in accounting, management, auditing in accordance to both Egyptian and American laws. The certificate will also give students the skills considered in demand by local and foreign companies operating in Egypt.



Investment and business directory in English

AS A service to the proposed investment market in Egypt and in response to the call for removing obstacles and opening numerous investment fields for Egyptians, Arabs and foreigners, in order to turn the wheels of production and increase the national reserves, Middle East for Economic Services has published an investment directory for Egypt in English, giving investors a complete picture of investment in Egypt. The directory includes company profiles, tax and customs regulations, investing in the new cities and free trade zones and much, much more.

The directory can be obtained from Middle East Economic Services at tel/fax 3351141/3606804.

The fruits of Austrian-Arab-Egyptian cooperation:

Contract signed to transfer know-how and supply of equipment to Dextro-Misr Co for sorbitol & anhydrous glucose production for the first time in Egypt, the Arab world and Africa

Total project investment: LE75 million

Project location: 10th of Ramadan City on 30 thousand sq. metres

AN AGREEMENT to transfer know-how and supply of technology to Dextro-Misr Co for sorbitol and anhydrous glucose production has been signed. The factory will be the first of its kind in Egypt, the Arab world and Africa, and will be established under an agreement with the Austrian company Vogelbusch, one of the leading companies operating in the field of bio-technology.

Annual production rates for the factory are expected to reach 7,500 tons of sorbitol 70% and 2,500 tons of anhydrous glucose. This output will not only cover Egyptian requirements of product but will also allow for export to the Arab world and neighbouring African countries.

Sorbitol 70% is considered a basic ingredient for pharmaceutical, foodstuff and health & beauty industries and is used in a multitude of other fields.

Anhydrous glucose is considered a basic ingredient in manufacturing compensatory medical solutions, dehydration formulas and advanced foodstuffs.

Total investment cost of the project will reach LE75 million, while the factory itself will be built on an area of 30 thousand square metres in 10th of Ramadan City. Production is expected to begin by the end of 1999.

Dextro-Misr's capital is held among a conglomerate of shareholders from Egypt and the Arab world, including the Arab Investment Company (Egypt), one of the most outstanding companies in the field of investment with international expertise in the field of investment management; the Joint Arab Investment Co (Egypt), a company noted for its long experience in the field of industrial investments in Egypt; the Abu Dhabi National Company for Foodstuffs (UAE), one of the largest companies operating in the field of trading and distributing foodstuff materials in the Arab Gulf region; the Kaki Group (Saudi Arabia), which has many investments in Egypt; the Jumayh Group, one of the leading Saudi associations for investment and trade; the Baghlaf Group, having outstanding expertise in the area of industrial development; and a leading group of businessmen from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, among them Dr Tallal Ghazawi, Mr Abdallah Al-Tweigri and Mr Hamed El-Wannis.

Signing the contract on the Austrian side was the Austrian Commercial Counsellor Dr Martin Glatz; Mr Stephen Kuzmits, vice-chairman of the Austrian company Vogelbusch; and Mr Tristan Shultze, technical manager of Vogelbusch. From the Egyptian side was Dr Ibrahim Ahmed Ezzat, representative of the shareholders; Dr Ali El-Silmi, member of the founders' committee; Mr Mustafa Kamel Murad, member of the founders' committee and general manager of the Joint Arab Investment Co; Dr Mohamed Abdel-Moneim Omran, managing director of the Joint Arab Investment Co; and Mr Amr Kanan, marketing manager of the Abu Dhabi National Company for Foodstuffs.

The project was the brainchild of Dr Ibrahim Ahmed Ezzat, as part of a plan to invest in bio-technology which Egypt and the Arab world requires and which until now has been considered a monopoly of advanced countries. This project is a response to the call made by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak for investment in the fields of advanced technology, the most important of these being in the field of bio-technology.

Dr Ibrahim Ahmed Ezzat had previously established the first factory in Egypt and the Arab world for the production of citric acids and its salts, (Citro-Misr) which is considered one of the most vital materials used in the production of pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs. It is worth mentioning that this project is nearing completion and will begin production by the start of next year. Citro-Misr is a company that came about as the result of cooperation with the Austrian company Vogelbusch. It is through Citro-Misr and Dextro-Misr that an advanced national workforce trained in different fields of bio-technology will be created.

It is also worth mentioning that Egypt's entry into this specialised field is considered an important step in countering the effects of the GATT on the pharmaceutical industry in Egypt and the Arab world. It is through this important step of establishing a national industry for pharmaceutical raw materials that the the effects of the GATT can be countered, and such an industry would also benefit other important industries.



(Left) Signing the agreement are (from right) Dr Mohamed Abdel-Moneim Omran, Mr Amr Kanan, Dr Ibrahim Ezzat, Mr Tristan Schultze, Mr Mustafa Kamel Murad, Mr Stephen Kuzmits, Dr Ali El-Silmi, and Dr Martin Glatz
(Above) Dr Ibrahim Ahmed Ezzat, chairman of the board, Citro-Misr and representative of the shareholders, Dextro-Misr

Kamal El-Ganzouri inaugurates the Made in India Exhibition

PRIME Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri inaugurated the Made in India exhibition on 15 April 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre. Among the attendees were Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and Minister of Industry and Mineral Wealth Soliman Reda. Welcoming the two ministers were Mrs Suseela Gobalan, minister of industry of the Indian state of Kira; Mr Virendra Gupta, Indian charge d'affaires in Cairo; Mr B Harish, commerce secretary at the Indian Embassy; Mrs Manny Makal, press advisor; and a large number of Egyptian and Indian businessmen.

Following the inauguration of the Made in India Exhibition, Prime Minister Ganzouri announced that President Hosni Mubarak would be visiting India sometime this year.

Ganzouri added that there are a number of joint ventures between the two countries currently underway, and that an Egyptian-Indian businessmen's council had been formed, with one session having already convened in India and another to be convened in Cairo.

The exhibition also pinpointed the areas of trade interest between India and Egypt, and the forthcoming period is expected to witness the signing of a number of cooperative agreements. The prime minister explained that the volume of trade between Egypt and other countries is conditional on global and regional conditions. The volume of trade between India and Egypt is continually flourishing, with Indian exports to Egypt increasing from $128 million in 1994 to $223 million in 1997, an increase of 74 per cent over the course of 3 years. Egyptian exports to India in 1994 reached $224 million, while in 1997 they reached $187 million. The total volume of trade between the two countries reached $410 million in 1997, a figure which can be doubled during the current and forthcoming years, especially due to the trade liberalisation that each country is experiencing at present.

Dr Kamal El-Ganzouri also called for Egyptian product exhibitions to be held in all parts of India, due to India's large market area and population, which make it an ideal country to encompass all kinds of Egyptian products. Cooperation between Indian and Egyptian businessmen through joint ventures can only bring about fruitful results which would fill the gap between the two countries.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri during the opening of the Made in India Exhibition. Also in the picture are Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Indian Minister of Industry Mrs. Suseela Gobalan, Minister of Industry Soliman Reda, and Indian Charge d'Affairs in Cairo Virendra Gupta

The forthcoming encounter with Crisis 2000

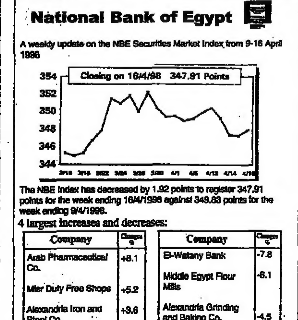
MANY of those who work with computer applications and data systems, such as managers and decision-makers, do not realise that present-day computer systems are not capable of processing the four digits that make up the year 2000 — rather, such systems were designed to only handle two. These people are also unaware that this will lead to an endless train of complications within businesses, companies, government and private organisations, which will in turn affect the general public overall.

Nearly all the nations of the world have formed several high-level committees seeking ways to counter this problem. Great Britain and the United States, for example, both rushed to issue standards for complying with the year 2000. Awareness of this problem is still small among developing nations in particular, and meanwhile the "Crisis of the 21st Century" still looms above.

Now, international organisations specialised in granting certificates of compliance with the year 2000 crisis have appeared, and the GATT may have a provision added to it calling for a Century Compliance Certificate, in addition to an ISO certificate as part of the standard requirements for a country to export and trade with other countries.

It is for this reason that the Arab Scientific Media Organisation (Shu'aa) came up with the notion to have an emergency Arab conference, which will be held from 27-28 May, during which experts and professionals from different parts of the Arab world will convene to discuss this vital issue, with the aim of providing a scientific solution to the crisis.

Nessim Al-Samadi, chairman of the board of Shu'aa, said that the conference would be the first of its kind in the region. "We in Egypt and the Arab world have lagged behind in keeping up in this area. It is for this reason that the field is wide open for national and international companies to display their products and integrated solutions in countering the crisis of the 'two zeroes', also known as Problem Y2K. This conference and exhibition will be a golden opportunity for companies to meet face-to-face with their customers seeking solutions."



National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 9-16 April 1998

The NBE Index has decreased by 1.92 points to register 347.91 points for the week ending 16/4/1998 against 349.83 points for the week ending 9/4/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %
Arab Pharmaceutical Co.	+8.1
Misr Duty Free Shops	+5.2
Alexandria Iron and Steel Co.	+3.6
El-Giza Contracting Co.	+3.0

Company	Change %
El-Watany Bank	-7.8
Middle Egypt Flour Mills	-6.1
Alexandria Grinding and Baking Co.	-4.5
KABO	-3.9

Al-Ahram Weekly

New frontiers

On Saturday, Egypt celebrates the 16th anniversary of Israel's troop withdrawal from Sinai. The event launched a revolution in the fortunes of the peninsula, which, until the 1967 invasion, had been viewed by the central government mainly as a buffer zone. The way things are going now, Sinai will soon become a showcase for Egyptian development. Statisticians are happy with the steady growth of Sinai's population in recent years. Strategists see the peninsula's build-up as a strong buffer against foreign intrusion.

Sinai's return to Egypt capped a 15-year struggle, first by arms and then by diplomacy. Israeli forces were pushed back from the eastern bank of the Suez Canal in the 1973 War, and a peace treaty was signed six years later. Under that treaty, the Israelis pulled out from all but a one-square-kilometre border enclave — Taba — at the northern tip of Gulf of Aqaba. The International Court of Justice quashed Israel's claim to Taba, and Egypt recovered it in 1989.

Until the French expedition at the end of the 18th century, the peninsula was the route taken by invading armies. For most of this century, many Egyptians imagined Sinai as little more than an expanse of desert with mountain ranges in the south, graced by rich oil fields along the Suez Gulf coast and policed by a few coast guard patrols.

That picture has changed drastically in the last 16 years. Luxurious tourist resorts have sprouted up along Sinai's coasts, attracting foreigners and Egyptians alike all year round.

The Al-Salam Canal is being dug across the northern stretches of the peninsula all the way from the Nile Delta, crossing under the Suez Canal, to Al-Arish near the eastern border. It will permit the cultivation of half a million acres. The project is expected to draw at least two million people to settle in Sinai. Furthermore, work began this month on a 225km-long railway line from the Suez Canal city of Ismailia to the border town of Rafah. A free zone and an industrial area are to be established in the peninsula just east of the Suez Canal bypass that flows into the Mediterranean.

War, peace and, now, development: Sinai is, in many ways, the last frontier.

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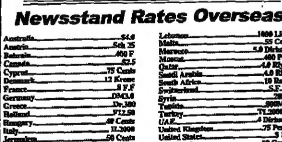
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Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$1.5
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		Yemen	10 Riyals



No rubber stamp for Netanyahu

Peace is not only a moral imperative, says Ibrahim Nafie, it is also part of the movement of history

Israel did all it could to transform its 50th anniversary celebrations into a major international media event. In fact, such was the fanfare with which the celebrations were presented on American television that one might have thought it was a US national holiday, rather than a landmark in the history of one of its friends and allies.

However, an occasion of such historic importance to those people who are directly concerned by it should not be seen as an opportunity to freeze and idolise the past. Rather, it should also look forwards to the future and define ways in which Israel can accommodate to the demands of change.

Over the first fifty years of their history as a modern nation, the Israelis have constructed their state, their philosophy and their military and civil institutions on the conceptual basis of a never-ending state of war against "the enemy." Since then times have changed, and it would seem only natural that their outlook should change accordingly. The last Labour government realised this and took the first steps in this direction. The current Prime Minister, in contrast, has done all in his power to drag the region back into the climate that prevailed before the peace process began. In so doing, he has showed himself lacking in a "peace culture". He has cut himself off from the path chosen by his predecessors who had made peace their option. And, in so doing, he has set himself against the tide of history.

In this regard, I pause to cite a prominent Jewish American who, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Israel, wrote: "Those in the US administration and Congress who support peace in the Middle East need something more than just opinion polls conducted among American Jews to assess the extent to which they support peace and oppose the policies of Binyamin Netanyahu. What they need is a positive sense that there is effective support for the peace movements. Instead of passively participating in the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Israel, which is automatically construed to imply full support for current Israeli policies, American Jews who support peace should come up with an alternative commemoration that will attract the attention of the US media and focus primarily on respect for the making of peace. They should not allow AIPAC [American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee] and its Jewish supporters to continue to intimidate the White House and to mobilise total support in Congress for policies which consolidate the status quo in the occupied Arab territories, create a climate conducive to terrorism and thus ultimately harm the future of Israel. This is not what the peace process requires at all and they should do something about it on this occasion."

The current Israeli leadership could not be more inimical to the "peace culture" represented by the commentator above. Ordinarily, one would suppose that political leaders are chosen for their qualities as statesmen, for their ability to rise to the challenges of history and for their capacity to make clear-sighted decisions based on a range of realistic options. The current Israeli leadership is clearly an exception to this rule. The path to peace has been clearly defined. It requires an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza and the establishment of a Palestinian state on these territories. Even Rabin eventually came to understand the self-evident truth that there can be no peace as long as the Palestinians are denied the right to statehood on their own land.

There was a time when Rabin did not accept these principles, nor could he have imagined coming to accept them. He simply acted in accordance with the prevalent mentality that his state was on a permanent war-footing, as was then appropriate given Israel's special relation with the US and its role in forwarding US cold war strategy in the Middle East. However, both Rabin and Peres possessed the political vision that enabled them to rise to the level of true statesmen and, faced with a major historical turning point, act in the larger interests of their nation and their people. As a result, Rabin and the Labour Party leadership came to recognise those realities they had formerly refused to acknowledge, and they acted accordingly. They signed the Oslo accords, whereby they accepted the principle of land for peace and, consequently, the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu has persistently sought to undermine the foundations laid by his predecessors. Moreover, his lack of political vision and statesmanship has rendered him incapable of realising that he is tearing down the very bridge on which he is standing — the bridge that should lead him and his people towards the future. The path he has chosen will not only bring him onto a collision course with the Palestinians and the neighboring Arab countries, but with the major international forces whose strategic outlook has altered in line with recent changes in the world order. These forces will not continue for long to allow Netanyahu to create a situation that threatens their national security interests.

If Israel still has sufficient influence within US political institutions to pressure them into not taking political decisions which the current Israeli prime minister disapproves of, this is nevertheless only a transitional phase. At a certain point, these institutions will revise their political and strategic options. This point will come when they realise that Israel's present demands are in essential conflict with their own vital interests. If the Israeli anniversary spectacle in the US failed to assume its true significance, it was because those who mounted it excluded from it all trace of these self-evident considerations.

Culture is, in essence, a set of attitudes. In the past, nationalist culture was characterised by the belief that the security and survival of the state rested upon the militaristic mobilisation of popular feeling, the accumulation of the materials of war and territorial expansion. To hark back to these outdated concepts, as the Israeli prime minister is doing today, flies in the face of the spirit of the times. Paradoxically, too, this retrograde vision carries the seeds of its own destruction, since it runs counter to the prevalent current of opinion within Israeli society itself.

The absence of any acknowledgement of this fact from the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel as they were celebrated in the US has thus been profoundly disturbing to many American Jews. That is why they refuse to let the occasion pass as though it were nothing but a rubber stamp condoning Netanyahu's determination to undermine the prospects for peace.

Can Ulster help the Middle East?

Tony Blair's remarkable achievement in bringing the Northern Ireland peace talks to a successful conclusion has raised hopes that he can help break the current impasse in the Middle East peace process. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** assesses the prospects

Twice in close succession recently, highly volatile and apparently irreconcilable conflicts were peacefully resolved through negotiations. The first was the recent crisis in Iraq, the second was the long-standing crisis between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland.

In both cases, deadlines were set for reaching a solution, although in the case of Ulster the negotiators went on bargaining well past the deadline, which was extended by seventeen hours. The idea of imposing a time-frame was to force the parties to fix their priorities and make the necessary, admittedly difficult, choices that any compromise solution entails. In both cases, the mechanism succeeded in forging concessions from the protagonists, leading many to consider using the same approach towards conflict-situations as complicated as the Basque problem in north-west Spain, or, closer to home, the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Of course, the situation differs from one case to another, as does the involvement of the great powers in the search for solutions to such conflicts, that is, whether they are willing to engage themselves in an active role as mediators or sponsors or to maintain a certain distance by merely hosting peace talks. In the case of the predominantly Protestant province of Northern Ireland, the British are closer to the Protestant majority, who call themselves unionists or loyalists and want Ulster to remain part of the United Kingdom, while Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, enjoys strong support in the United States. Indeed, the US has been a haven for generations of Irish immigrants who today constitute a powerful lobby in American society. They enjoy the support of the American president, not only because he himself is of Irish descent but because the Democratic party needs the Irish vote if it is to prevail in the forthcoming legislative and presidential elections. The Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland, known as nationalists or republicans, call for the unification of Ireland and the independence of Ulster from Great Britain.

We are thus dealing with a conflict whose main regional protagonists respectively are supported by two great powers, the United Kingdom and the United States. The excellent relations between the top decision-makers of the two powers created a sort of balance which helped crown the Northern Ireland peace talks with success. Of course, Washington, unlike London, is not a direct party to the conflict. Clinton interceded because Tony Blair called on him to do so. There is also the fact that a former American senator, George Mitchell, has been acting as mediator between the parties in Northern Ireland for many years. He was instrumental in devising the guidelines on which the recent agreement was based.

It must be said too that conditions were ripe for a breakthrough. The warring factions themselves had become weary of a conflict that has been going on for generations, and London was becoming increasingly aware that the time had come to bring an end to a conflict that was preventing it from concentrating on other priorities. Northern Ireland may have been a priority at the beginning of the 20th century, when it was an important centre of industry — the Titanic was built in its shipyards — but it gradually deteriorated over the last decades. The City would now prefer to shift its attention to the promising markets of the European Union, and concentrate on coping with the challenge of a unified European currency.

It would therefore appear that there is a globalist dimension to the Ulster peace settlement. State sovereignty is no longer the sole factor which determines how relentless disputes are to be overcome. A basic premise of the new political structure in the British province of Northern Ireland is that it will be put to referendums on 22 May in the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Irish Republic and in the mostly Protestant North. It will give the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland more political power and increase the influence of the Irish Republic in northern affairs. But it will also assure the Protestant majority that there will be no united Ireland unless it is approved by a majority, which is not likely to happen until well into the new century. The deal, if approved in the referendums, would create a Northern Ireland assembly that for the first time would cooperate formally with the Republic of Ireland. But the North will remain firmly tied to Britain. Such an arrangement makes relations between Britain and Ireland, both members of the European Union, less tense.

A question worth pondering is how the mechanics of this agreement could be useful to the intractable Arab-Israeli conflict. Tony Blair came to the site of the conflict this week with many cards in hand: his startling success in Ulster, his huge popularity at home, his present leadership of the European Union, his excellent relations with the US president. He has succeeded in convincing both Arafat and Netanyahu to come to London on 4 May for talks that might bring them face to face. This represents a significant step forward towards resuming Middle East negotiations on procedure. But it still gives no sign of progress on substance. This is where comparing notes with Ulster could be meaningful.

Metamorphosis

By Naguib Mahfouz

Islam is a religion which appeals to the intellect: it exalts knowledge, and accords scientists a pre-eminent place. It has drawn on some of the most humanistic elements of other civilisations, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of colour or economic and social status. Absolute equality between rich and poor, rulers and subjects: this is the foundation of relations in an Islamic society.

In all philosophical and thought systems, however, there is a right and a left wing as well as the moderate centre. The extremist, exclusionary interpretation of Islam which prevails today is not a specificity of our times, nor an innovation. As everything depends on context, however, a phenomenon at which we used to laugh has become a very serious threat. When I was young, we found extremism laughable, because the social environment then was hostile to extremist ideas.

But the ideas we once mocked are gaining ground. Many Muslims continue to believe and practice their faith with the tolerance that used to be the norm. Yet there are others who, finding themselves in an altered environment, are fighting to survive. They have become fierce in their defence of their narrow interpretations. This poison has nothing to do with Islam, but it is no less deadly for all that.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

To The Editor

More than waistlines

Sir- Mrs Jill Hassan, of Maadi, seems to have misunderstood the point of my comments ("To the Editor", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 9-15 April). Whereas most of my comments dealt with dress, hairstyles, jewellery and attitude, the better part of Mrs Hassan's letter castigates me for what I had to say about the weight of our anchorwomen and TV presenters. Regarding this particular point, I believe it is Mrs Hassan who needs to "get real"!

Could she possibly have failed to notice that her wish to see people not "falling within the accepted norms" has long been granted, and that our TV channels have an unusually high incidence of rather — err, plump ladies ? She adds that she wants to see this happen,"like in other countries". Which countries exactly does she have in mind? Even in "politically correct" Michigan, or elsewhere in that land of equal opportunities, I doubt she will see too many Roseannes or Kathy Bates among TV presenters. If she zaps from one satellite channel to the other on her TV, she will be hard put to find any either, whether from East or West.

Let me stress the fact that I was not talking about all plump, fat, or obese people (take your choice of adjectives), and I certainly did not exclude male presenters from my remarks. Having some 10 kilos myself which I don't seem able to shed, I fully sympathise with the difficulties encountered by those wishing to lose weight. I quite agree that it is high time for women everywhere to be accepted for what they are, for what they can contribute, rather than for looking like Claudia Schiffer. When I spoke of accepted norms for TV presenters, I meant the norms accepted within a particular profession or occupation. I was commenting on the handful of people who present our programmes, and who, like it or not, need to conform to an idealised image.

To take Mrs Hassan's argument a little further, if there are no accepted norms for weight, then why should there be any norms for dress, make-up, hairstyles or other criteria? Models, for example, must look as though they had undergone months of a devastating famine. Why should that be? I don't know, but that is the way it is. People who appear in movies and on TV must usually look "nice", whatever that means in their particular culture, for they are perpetrating some kind of romantic myth. As for the rest of us mortals, we are free to look as we want, or muddle through as we can.

Luckily, we live in a country where one can still emit an opinion without being immediately sued for harassment or discrimination, and even though it might be "politically incorrect", I'll take that any time. The huge majority of our women, Mrs Hassan, are concerned not with their weight, but with their daily bread, with their basic rights, which so far seem to elude them. They haven't the foggiest idea who Barbie is, and bulimia and anorexia, being diseases of the affluent, are unknown to them. Feminism and political correctness, ageism, sexism, fattism, all this is not within their daily experience, and therefore quite irrelevant. Get real!

Djenane Kamil
Maadi

Narrowing the gap

Sir- I read with great interest Salama A Salama's column, titled "Officious business" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 2-8 April), in which he lambasted the bill on the protection of the rights of religious minorities currently under review by the US House of Representatives. As a Copt, I can't agree more with Mr Salama as regards the rejection of any US meddling in Egypt's internal affairs. It is indeed strange that the US passes itself off as the protector of human rights when its own record in this respect is hardly commendable.

Muslims and Copts have common problems as Egyptians. However, it is not at all fair to deny the fact that Copts do have their own problems. To pretend that everything is just fine leads us to nothing. A gap does exist between Muslims and Copts, and has been getting wider since the early '70s. The real problem is that both Copts and Muslims misunderstand the essence of their religion.

We should not be taken in by the rosy picture our mass media is trying to paint. Something concrete must be done to solve the existing problems. Bigotry and prejudice obstruct any real understanding. We must encourage open-mindedness, objectivity, and enlightenment.

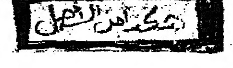
It is the duty of intellectuals and men of religion to remove misconceptions with a view to creating a new generation that is able to accept and respect "the other" regardless of any differences. Our future depends on how well we are able to understand each other.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Assiut

All readers' contributions and comments should be addressed to The Editor. E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg; Fax: +202 578 6089



Magda Al-Rumi is in Cairo in celebration of Sinai Liberation Day, but she will also be singing a song of mourning: a poem written to mark the second anniversary of the Qana massacre. While she is renowned for her ornate features, striking beauty and soaring voice, I tried to underplay the aesthetic qualities of her features, focusing on strong lines instead: large eyes from a Persian miniature; cheekbones to open letters; and the smile that never leaves her face when she sings.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Party favours

The youthful, friendly smile, the efforts to ensure that his participation in Israel's fiftieth anniversary celebrations went smoothly, the exuberance at having concluded peace with northern Ireland: Tony Blair's visit was successful — if only in form, not content. He convinced Arafat and Netanyahu to travel to London for bilateral talks with Albright at the end of May. It is hoped, though not predicted, that these talks could culminate in a peace conference.

Although similar bilateral meetings were held by Albright with Netanyahu and Arafat in London and Geneva to no avail, some analysts consider the meetings an achievement for which Blair, as the head of the European Union, must be congratulated. Other than conveying the invitation, however, Blair's role, which has been described as useful, positive and complementary to the US role, is highly unclear. Arafat's disappointment came through clearly at the press conference when he interrupted Blair by asking — or, rather, entreating — him to hold a meeting in London attended by the US, Israel, Palestine and the EU.

Arafat had refused to meet with Netanyahu unless some agreement was reached on Israel's implementation of the withdrawal provisions in the Oslo Accords. While no one has any notion of the developments that may have taken place since Blair's visit, it was noted that Blair was reluctant to go into any specifics regarding either implementation of the accords or the points of contention which have deadlocked the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations for a year now. Blair reiterated his advice that good intentions were needed on both sides, and emphasised the grave implications if Middle East peace efforts fail. But he mumbled his condemnation of the construction of new Jewish settlements — EU policy clearly states that they jeopardise peace — and condemned settlement expansion under his breath. His tone became stern, however, as he dwelled on the division of labour between the US and EU. The talks in London, he said, would revolve around US proposals, which is the same as saying that London will do little more than host the conference.

The US's proposals are a secret so far. But according to details which leak out from time to time, they pertain to Israel's haggling on the percentage of occupied land from which it will agree to withdraw — as if it had the title deeds to this land. Israel rejected the proposals brought by Ross on his most recent visit; no details of these are known. If there is indeed a new initiative, it will entail more concessions to Israel and greater burdens on Palestinian shoulders. This, no doubt, is the gist of the new ideas the US coordinator of the peace process will bear next week, as he prepares the groundwork for the meeting in London.

Ross has concluded one round of talks and is about to launch a new one. The British foreign minister was followed by the prime minister. So far, Israel has shown no sign of budging. The only difference is that Blair played up his personal ties with Israel by participating in the fiftieth anniversary ceremonies. He wished to suggest, with appropriate fanfare, that the peace process in the Middle East is about to witness a breakthrough similar to the Irish-British settlement. But despite his good offices and his keen desire to foster a European role, he never looked at the details of the Palestinian or Israeli positions; nor did he make any statement about which party was impeding the peace process. Such matters are strictly for the US to decide. The EU is always there to cheer and wave. How could Tony Blair win a battle lost by Albright and by Clinton himself?





Soapbox

Biting the hand

All Israeli governments, including Netanyahu's, worry that US public opinion could turn against an Israeli policy adverse to peace and detrimental to US interests in the Middle East.

According to Israeli economic reports, the trade deficit and the country's economy depend on foreign financing, to the tune of $111 billion since the state of Israel was established. Almost two thirds of this amount consists of non-refundable loans from foreign governments, particularly the US; the savings or pensions of Jewish immigrants; and donations from Jewish organisations abroad. The remaining third consists of loans from governments, banks and individuals. Official loans from the US government, characterised by excessively long maturities, constitute the greater part of Israel's external public debt.

The chronic deficit resulting from military expenditure and the expansion of settlements has always been a major weakness in the Israeli economy. The current balance of trade not only reveals Israel's continued and heavy reliance on external resources, but casts doubt on Israel's ability to pursue its growth at rates like those which prevailed throughout the early '90s.

Israel's dependence gives an idea of the pressure the US can exercise on domestic Israeli politics. We need to boost the Clinton administration's growing awareness of the harm US double standards can cause. Arab and international efforts should be stepped up to expand the significant segments of the American public that oppose policy decisions damaging to US interests. We must ask these potential allies why the US persists in offering unconditional economic and military support to Israel, when the Netanyahu government itself does not hesitate to harm US interests.

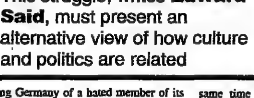


This week's Soapbox speaker is deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Taha Abdel-Alim

Art, culture, and nationalism

This struggle, writes **Edward Said**, must present an alternative view of how culture and politics are related



I have just returned from a short trip to Berlin, where I participated in a week-long festival dedicated not only to the performance but also to the discussion of great musical works associated with German nationalism, a nationalism, no one needs to reminded, that led to the collective insanity of Hitlerian facism. The core of the musical programme was a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg* (The Mastersingers of Nuremberg), which he composed just after *Tristan and Isolde*, and in the middle of writing his vast four-opera cycle, *The Ring of the Nibelung*. What gives *Meistersinger* its special character is the paradox that, alone of all his operas, it is a comedy with a happy ending, and yet, because of one of its main themes, was of particular importance not just to the Nazis but to Hitler himself.

The work was originally performed in 1868, roughly three years before the unification of Germany under Bismarck, but it strangely presages the rise of a virulent German nationalism that reached paroxysms of chauvinism during the period of the Third Reich: near the very end of the gigantic work, one passage in the opera seems to suggest that "holy German art" must be protected from foreign influences in order for it to remain "German and true". This passage alone was elevated by the Nazis to the level of doctrine. Anything that did not fit the prescription of what was traditionally "German art" was therefore considered bad, and had to be expunged — or so Wagner's later disciples and interpreters suggested.

The opera is set in 16th-century Nuremberg, which Wagner saw as an analogy for the contemporary world in which he lived. At the core of the opera are a group of "mastersingers," that is, skilled singers who are experts in the rules and forms of traditional German choral art. They form a sort of guild, and yet at the same time, each of them is a craftsman or bourgeois citizen with a specific trade. The hero of the opera is Hans Sachs, a shoemaker as well as skilled singer himself, who adopts the cause of a young nobleman, Walther, who wants to become a mastersinger and marry Eva, the woman offered as a prize for the best singer.

Walther is a gifted musician and poet, but is impatient with the rules. His rival is Sixtus Beckmesser, the town clerk, a mastersinger, and an aspirant to Eva's hand. By the end of the opera, the two men sing in a contest for the right to marry Eva, except that Beckmesser fails miserably (despite the fact that he knows the rules very well), whereas Walther wins because, thanks to Hans Sachs's help, he combines knowledge of the rules with genuine originality. After the contest is over and Walther duly crowned a new mastersinger and husband of Eva, Sachs then sings to the assembled towns people of Nuremberg how important it is to understand the new, and yet not to forget "the traditional German masters", and of course their genuine, "pure German art".

Over time, Beckmesser has been interpreted both by German nationalists and by anti-Germans as Wagner's portrait of a hated Jew, although in the opera itself Beckmesser is as German as everyone else and not at all Jewish. But because, at the end of the opera, Beckmesser disgraces himself, sings an ugly song, and is thrown out of the contest, it has often been assumed that what Wagner had in mind — notorious anti-semite that he was — was nothing less than a ceremony of ridding Germany of a hated member of its society, that is, the Jew. And so the Nazis seemed to have thought: performances of *Meistersinger* during the Nazi era were used on important state occasions to celebrate Germany's cultural purity and, at the same time, to demonstrate how Jews were to be treated.

Since World War II, a heated debate has raged around this opera, which is acknowledged by all as a great masterpiece: is it mainly a eulogy to German culture, and hence a document of the kind of rabid German nationalism that led to Nazism and Auschwitz, or is it a work of art in which ugly thoughts and frightening suggestions play a role but by no means determine the whole work's meaning? In Berlin, then, we debated this point, especially since our deliberations took place in the German State Opera, right in the heart of what was the capital of the Third Reich.

It is part of Wagner's endless complexity that one can see in *Meistersinger* both the seeds of what was to come during the great Nuremberg rallies of the 1930s as well as a humane and rich work of art that tries to show the connection between culture and an evolving nation. To interpret Wagner only as a prophet of facism is, I believe, to miss what he himself also felt about the dangers of a nationalism that could go too far. What Sachs says at the end of the work, therefore, is that people should remain in touch with their collective past, yet also be able to develop by recognising new and valuable experiences that do not fit the nationalist prescription. And it is new and Other experiences that keep culture from freezing into a hard set of doctrines: culture is culture only when it is renewed, re-interpreted, re-lived. The death of culture is literalism, that is, the practice of turning tradition and history into orthodoxy and authoritarianism.

A great deal of this discussion in Germany is relevant to contemporary Arab culture, which is undergoing a similar process of self-searching and reinvigoration. For us, however, our relationship with our own past, traditions, and art is complicated by our encounters with the West and Israel, both of which seem to have deprived us of various continuities and self-confidence. In both instances these two outside presences still command an extraordinary amount of our attention since both remain to challenge us culturally as well as politically. The result has been an astonishing contradiction between public defiance and private anxiety, between ringing declarations of official nationalism and abject collaboration with our enemies.

For years, the orthodox rhetoric of Arab nationalism stipulated that Israel was an irreducible enemy, its aggression against the Arabs an unacceptable collective assault, its very presence a burden from which we needed to be liberated. Then all of a sudden it was possible not only to accept Israel, but to conclude peace arrangements with the "Jewish state", and at the same time actively to solicit American mediation. Even after the various peace arrangements revealed that Israeli governments still had active designs on Palestinian land, and Israeli settlers and soldiers remained in possession of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian territories, the language of the peace process continued, at the same time that America did nothing to stop Israel, but in fact supported the most extreme of Israeli governments, that of Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud.

So glaring and irreconcilable were the requirements of Arab collective orthodoxy that all sorts of amazing claims began to appear, many of them concerning Palestine. Take as an exceptionally remarkable incident the case of recent attacks on the Beirut Theatre (Masrah Beirut), which organised a series of impressive events to commemorate the Palestinian side of Israel's fifty years (reported in *Al-Hayat*, 17 April).

The principal organiser, Elias Khouri, is a very gifted novelist, editor, and intellectual who has remained committed to the secular and democratic goals of the Palestinian revolution. As a Lebanese citizen, he could very easily have forgotten about Palestine, given that, since 1982, the whole issue has been surrounded with ambiguities, compromises, and appallingly difficult complications for the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. But he, and his colleagues at the theater, including Fawwaz Trabulsi among several others, have remained committed to the ideals for which all of us, Palestinian and non-Palestinian, have been struggling, the core of which is a belief in the necessity of justice, non-discrimination, and equality: precisely those qualities of citizenship which Israel has denied the Palestinian people. The argument is a universalistic one, that all peoples, regardless of religion, race or language, are entitled to the same civil, political and human rights. Given Israel's radical mistreatment of its "non-Jewish" citizens on the grounds of both religion and language, the only intellectually responsible position is to assert the invalidity of such discrimination, replacing it not with discrimination for Arabs, but rather non-discrimination for all.

In this respect, therefore, the Palestinian struggle has derived much of its moral argument from the support of non-Zionist Jews, especially those Jews in Arab countries like Morocco and Tunisia who have suffered precisely because they opposed the Zionism of their own communities. This was also the case with Palestinian Jews and, more recently, Sephardic Jews (from Yemen and Iraq and Egypt), who went to Israel but whose persecution because they were not Ashkenazi Jews has turned them into powerful critics of the Jewish state. One of the more interesting panels in Beirut was to have been made up of a group of Arab Jews, all of whom without exception — I think particularly of the Moroccan Ibrahim Sarfati, imprisoned for many years by King Hassan — have paid very heavily for their public support of radical non-Zionist ideas.

How outrageous and unacceptable, then, the hue and cry against Beirut Theatre for inviting such people, on the pretext that this was "normalisation" with the Israeli enemy. The scheduled panel was cancelled. So false and utterly specious is this notion that it returns us to the kind of discredited German nationalism that culminated in German fascism, whose main cultural argument against the German Jews was that they were not "really" German, but outsiders whose presence in some way sullied and tarnished the pristine essence of what, as Wagner's character had said in *Meistersinger*, was "true and German" (*echt und Deutsch*).

The notion that pure cultures, pure identities, and pure nations really exist is supremely arrogant and without merit at all. No culture, no nation, no people is free of an enormous variety of mixes. What would Germany have been without Italy, or without Greece or France, or without the Slavs, and now the Turks and Kurds and Arabs that make up a large part of its present reality? Very little, and very little also if one says, as Hitler and Goebbels did, that even German Jews, who spoke German and considered German culture their culture, were not *really* German, as if being really German was something that could be legislated and even created in a laboratory.

Human history and reality are more complex than that, and always contain "impurities" that it would be folly to exclude or destroy. What is it, then, that we have against Israel if we say that we want a "pure" Palestine, free of Jews, free of everything that isn't pure Arab and Muslim and Palestinian? Nothing at all: we would be mimicking exactly what it is that we attack. And how idiotic and narrow-minded, how chauvinistic and racist it is to define a person not by his/her ideas and values, but by his racial origins, religion or culture.

What I found particularly important about the German discussion is that it took place at all. Our situation, it seems, does not permit honest discussion of that sort, as if the notion that there is a real Palestinian struggle on behalf of real freedom and democracy is something that frightens the establishment, as if the idea that people demand the same respect and consideration from Israel towards the Palestinian people which it has dispossessed and oppressed is also an argument that should not be stated, and re-stated, within the Arab world.

One language and universal rights, although honored rhetorically, turn out to be very dangerous things when spoken both at home in the Arab world and abroad in places like Paris and New York. The challenge is not to admit a double standard and two different languages, for that would be to fall into the very trap which we claim Israel has not evaded. Our struggle must present an alternative view of how culture and politics are related. We cannot say that only Arabs can speak about Arabs, and only Arab Muslims can discuss Palestine. In other words, we must either be part of the solution or, terrible as it may be to admit, part of the problem. The attacks on Elias Khouri and Beirut Theatre are a scandal of hypocrisy and frenzied, out-of-control chauvinism. We can ill afford such nonsense, and, given the enormity of Israeli persecution of "non-Jews" (i.e. Palestinians), we can do a lot better than simply replicating the same bankrupt xenophobia in the midst of our struggle.

More than just acquaintances

The US and Egypt are working to minimise their differences. **Abdel-Azim Hammad** examines the implications

Maintaining a strategic dialogue between Egypt and the US through a permanent and well-regulated channel is the most recent project being studied by the two countries. Together with the Mubarak-Gore initiative for Egyptian-American partnership, it is considered the first serious and ambitious attempt, since the October War of 1973, to fill an important gap in the friendly relations between the two countries.

These relations were in need of a reference framework to determine objectives and means of implementing joint work, to set up the necessary mechanisms for monitoring points of agreement, and to predict possible points of contention. The two sides had never before identified principles and mechanisms for the management and settlement of disagreements.

The lack of management in Egyptian-US relations may be observed in any cooperation or discord between Cairo and Washington on the regional or international levels, and in bilateral relations as well, with only one exception. This is the explicit US commitment, since 1974, to the sustained provision of annual economic and military aid to Egypt. The lack of management, in addition to other factors, however, has given rise to acute crises on several occasions. These were eventually settled without inflicting significant damage on bilateral relations, thus proving that friendship is essential for both parties. The need for it is stronger than all the pressure elements wielded in the opposing direction.

For some years, opinions were being loudly voiced in Congress and the US administration as to the need to reduce foreign aid. But in 1994, the Mubarak-Gore initiative for Egyptian-US partnership was taken. It aims at transferring the donor-receiver aid pattern into a cooperative agreement between two partners in trade and development.

The slow development of the Egyptian-US partnership in the past year has alerted authorities in both capitals to the political problems that may obstruct the partnership initiative. Diplomatic circles in Egypt and the US did not conceal that Vice-president Al Gore, President Mubarak's partner in the initiative, had postponed his visit to Egypt three times in the last year for political reasons. One of these reasons was that President Mubarak had declined the US president's invitation to the White House summit in autumn 1996, following the incident of the Al-Aqsa tunnel. Another reason was reported at the time by several American newspapers, which stated that Al Gore is the US administration's staunchest advocate of giving Netanyahu's government ample time to test its hard-line policy on the Arabs. At the time, Egypt openly objected to this strategy. As a result, Israel's friends accused Egypt of backing the Palestinian "hard line" and of impeding peace efforts.

Consequently, Egyptian policy makers concluded that it was necessary to develop a channel for regular political dialogue between Cairo and Washington, in parallel with, and as a complement to, the Mubarak-Gore economic partnership. This would provide optimum opportunities for success, and avert the eruption of acute crises caused by inevitable differences.

The "Egyptian-US Strategic Dialogue Draft Project" was presented by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa to his US counterpart, Madeleine Albright, during her visit to Cairo last November. She agreed in principle, and promised to study it before submitting it to the US Security Council and President Clinton. It would seem that these steps have now been taken. The project is no longer shrouded in secrecy.

A few weeks ago, the Middle East News Agency carried a statement by Ahmed Maher, the Egyptian ambassador to Washington. He said the most prominent feature of the project will be its establishment within an institutional context. This will entail the founding of a permanent committee for the management of the strategic dialogue, headed by assistants to the Egyptian and US foreign ministers. The main objective of the dialogue would be to enhance the points of agreement between the policies of both countries. Points of difference would be monitored, with a view to narrowing them as far as possible.

Diplomatic sources in Cairo feel that the proposed dialogue will be more ambitious than the outline given by the Egyptian ambassador. His statement was brief and cautious. This is natural, for the project is still in its earliest stages. The dialogue will be held at the level of the two foreign ministers. The experts' preliminary meetings will benefit from a great deal of flexibility with regard to the frequency of sessions and the topics included on the agenda.

The Egyptian side also hopes that the new channel will serve as the cornerstone for other dialogues between the competent official institutions of both countries, as well as other non-governmental bodies.

The Egyptian foreign ministry, apparently, has already started drafting its proposals for the agenda of the strategic dialogue with the US. At the top of the agenda will be the bills before the US Congress concerning the alleged persecution of Copts in Egypt. Other points address the areas of friction between Egyptian vital interests and the recently activated US policy in Africa, particularly with reference to the Sudan, the Nile Basin, the Horn of Africa, Egyptian-Libyan relations, the Iraqi problem, relations with Iran: issues touching upon what Egypt rightfully considers as its regional role, a matter the US should comprehend. In addition, there are other issues concerning security and armament in the Middle East, as well as the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Egypt believes that its relations with the US are strategic, and cannot be abandoned, regardless of the numerous differences between the two countries. The US holds similar views on its relations with Egypt. The time is now highly propitious for establishing close relations on a solid basis, to preserve the balance between interests and rights, avert the deterioration of differences into crises, and protect friendly relations. That friendship is necessary to the stability of the Middle East. It can serve to minimise the pressures and intervention of the US Zionist lobby, or, at the very least, to reduce the damages ensuing therefrom.

The writer is an assistant chief editor at Al-Ahram.

Al-Ahram Weekly

On the prowl

David Blake watches the grim game of power



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet*: Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo: Jean-Christophe Maillot, choreography; Ernest Pignon-Ernest, decor; Jerome Kaplan, costumes; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House: 13 April*

This is not about Romeo or Juliet. It is about Lawrence — not of Arabia, but of Mantua.

It is a cleverly designed, architectured shadow play, a set of variations on *Romeo and Juliet*. Useful, since everyone thinks he knows the play anyway. This permits shortcuts and variations, adding 1990s spice to what is anyway just another old story of passions and lusts all scrambled into an indigestible mess.

There is no mess in this production. Everything is done with the swipes and slashes of an immaculately wielded scalpel. Maillot, the choreographer, and Prokofiev's music do all the rest. It has the professionalism and clean striking gestures of Busoni's versions of Bach.

The scene is an open stage. Almost nothing but oblong sponge-like masses which move about to suggest change of scene. There is a raked ramp upon which the characters and the lighting are used to suggest the great emotional climaxes. The dancers rush, crawl or merely die up and down it. This scene, like everything else about the production, is practical, useful. It looks like an operating theatre of a well-run hospital. No tears here for the old story. Everything is cool, sardonic and slightly off balance — but don't judge too quickly. The choreographer knows his business. The tale is not exactly told but suggested by brilliant wide awake ideas and particularly by the most beautiful dancers we have seen in Cairo.

Cairo has had a few Romeos over the years: the splendour of the Lithuanian Ballet's version, the melodramatic force of the Ballet de Lyon and the moving one by the Cairo Opera Ballet itself. But the Monte-Carlo takes the cup. It has no tears, not even bitterness or comment on the power ploys of the crazy mafiatic Mantuans. It is a shrug. It offers the corollary of "nothing is true, so everything is permitted". We are not shocked: we merely realize that these are humans, they do what everyone else does, part of the river of life at work. And is it murky. The great thing about the Monte-Carlo version is that after it is over the full force of its power and originality begins to work like a good slow poison with no incriminating signs to give away the secret of how or who.

Things suddenly appear on stage through the bland, pastel-lit walls — as if a large cobra is looking at you through a hole in your own dining room.

No romance in this *Romeo*. Shakespeare did not go much for kings and duchesses and all that sort of thing. All that authority, he did not like it. What he made was a power play of lust and death.

Romeo and Juliet in this show are young. They do what the young do in the face of authority, but these two have been all screwed up in the process. Black or white, the two families are so designated. The law is: do not step out of line or you've had it. And Romeo and Juliet are scions of families who mattered in Mantuan society.

Maillot's work on *Romeo and Juliet* is very up to the minute. This place, seething and moving about, could be Mantua or Paris or Los Angeles, preferably the latter where all the angels are lost. The ballet suggests as well as shows. Every move matters. So the big Mantuan screw is on. For Romeo and Juliet there is no time for love, and all they are able to execute is a tribal dance of death.

Chief screwer in all this movement of bodily circulation is, of all people, Friar Lawrence, dredged up out of Shakespeare's Mantuan fish net. He is danced by a tall, shapely creature, Gaetan Morlotti, in severe clinging street style black — fashionably bald as a beetle and as manipulative and stealthily motivated as a cattle tick. He wants blood — of the soul. He oozes sex, spreads it around. Tactuality is his middle name and, in spite of his build, he is not a one to spend a night with, even a spiritual one. But he dominates the ballet. This is the wise and kindly Friar who in the play is supposed to help the children solve their problems. But of course he does not, even in the play, and certainly not in this ballet. He is a fighter. When this black jack appears, get ready for street rhythm, and it always begins from the pelvis. He is everywhere, sliding and strutting over people, under them, and suddenly emerging from dark corners like a malevolent ghost. He runs the show and two minions who seem to be agents of death and sleep. He is Nietzschean, and upsets the balance of the story. Romeo and Juliet are coolly dusted off the center stage, almost erased.

The choreography is also a mystery: demi-classique is the nearest we get to any known form of dance. Dance theatre it is not, lacking as it does didacticism. It is quite brilliant in avoidance of any routine forms. Maillot has worked so hard with his group. He has erased himself as choreographer. The dancers do not give the impression of dancing at all, but appear to improvise. Everything is fresh. It follows the music of Prokofiev's sudden electric pauses. Then the dancers freeze, holding positions like statues. As the huge waves of sound flood the stage full of bodies all actively dancing, the dancers go against the tempo and into exaggerated slow motion. As with great dancing companies, the Alvin Ailey for example, there is no time lapse between conception and execution. They are not dancers, they are beings who move of their own volition out beyond themselves, proud, insolently conscious of their own physical perfection. Thrilling to watch.

This company more than lives up to its exalted position in the history of 20th century dance. They are all stars, they all shine — none more luminous than Ina Broeckx who danced at all the performances as Lady Capulet. Her eminence and projection is as a true star who cannot help being one. Her skin, from her long elegant feet to the top of her head, is star. Likewise her feeling for music. As Lady Capulet her arrival is of tremendous importance. She carries authority like Norah Kaye. Not an over-stuffed old bore wearing a false tiara as usual, but a being lithe as a Siames fighting fish. To see her cross the stage after chastising Juliet for not following the social mores, walk up the ramp, stop, and turn to her victim and melt into an attitude flawlessly elegant and vicious is heart stopping.

Romeo and Juliet — Maillot has almost wiped the slate of them. All we really want to know is what the big man in black is up to, and who takes Lady Capulet late night dancing. Nothing is made clear, even death. Romeo and Juliet merely appear to die.

There is a chill wind blowing up along sunset boulevard. Perhaps Laurence has gone off on his bike. There is no sign of Romeo and Juliet, either in bed or being mourned as dead bodies. They may have gone along the boulevard, over the hills to the Pacific and beyond. Such people do not have names. They are merely losers.

Cinema

Crass flicks and old lace

D H Lawrence meets the yellow press in an everyday tale of feminism, infertility and blatant self-promotion. **Khairiya El-Bishlawi** finds the going heavy

Inas El-Degheidi's *Dantella* (Lace), an *Eid* release, begins with a dedication: "To every woman who thought she might lose her friend because of a man I dedicate this film." That is certainly the theme on which the film elaborates. *Lace* describes a conflict between two women friends over a man. In the end, the situation is resolved when both women decide to reject the man and dedicate themselves instead to raising the little girl who is the fruit of their triangular relationship.

In *Lace*, sexual relationships between men and women — and between women and women — are reminiscent of a number of American films. Among these films are those based on certain D H Lawrence novels, especially *Women in Love*. *Lace* also calls to mind several Western films produced in the 1960s, at the heights of the first-wave feminist movement — with the difference, of course, that these films sprang directly from current trends in the culture, whereas *Lace* ends up offering a counterfeit of these Western ideas to an audience very much rooted in the traditions and values of the Middle East.

After countless sequences set in bedrooms, the film concludes that an intimate relationship between two women can allow them to dispense with the need for a man and that a woman's strength resides essentially in her breaking free from the power of man which is primarily premised on his virility. The character played by Yousra is thus driven to deal a crippling blow to Hossam's genitals when she fails to get him to stay with her on the night allotted to his second wife, her former best friend.

As an officer, Hossam is a failure; the only function he performs properly in this film is that of procreation. This is a function which comes in for a great deal of sarcasm: in *Lace*, men either indulge in sex to excess or let themselves be overpowered by women. The writer and the director, both women themselves, use this simplistic assumption to stage their demand that women reject patriarchal norms and turn to each other instead for comfort and communication.

When I was at this film over the *Eid*, the theatre was packed with teenage boys. There were very few women. It was interesting to listen to the adolescents' very vocal comments. They clapped profusely during dancing scenes, screamed and screeched during the many sex scenes, and at the moment when Hossam (Mahmoud Hemeida) gasps loudly as he climaxes, echoed him to a man, thus turning the theatre into the aural equivalent of an orgy. They weren't wrong either. *Lace* is nothing but a sensationalist piece of commercial cinema, in which the alleged feminist issues are drowned out by a cacophony of female voices trading insults.

The film simply collapses all the possible — and probable — obstacles that might stand in the way of full emotional empathy between two women from extremely different backgrounds. Mariam (Elham Shahin) is a member of the educated middle classes, while her childhood friend, Sahar El-Layali (Yousra) is an illiterate dancer performing in third-rate cabarets. The two (supposedly) young women obviously lead very different lives: Mariam has just graduated and is about to start her career as a lawyer; Sahar enjoys a rich and varied nightlife unrestrained by taboos.

Yet despite their differences, they enjoy an apparently harmonious relationship which is finally disturbed only when a man enters their lives. This happens when Sahar, who is drunk, runs a man over. She is taken to a police station. Mariam intervenes, speaking to the officer, Hossam, on her behalf. Hossam falls for Mariam, but Mariam, who reciprocates his feelings, turns him down to spare Sahar's emotions.

Mariam marries an engineer and moves with him to Canada, but is constantly reminded by Sahar's phone calls of both her friend and Hossam. She then demands a divorce and returns to Egypt with hopes of marrying Hossam. Meanwhile, Sahar has become a big star, with her photo on the cover of the magazine *Sayedati Sadati*. The editor of the magazine so tackily advertised is no other than Hala Sarhan, the writer of the film and best buddy of the director. The film, therefore, packages itself as a vehicle for feminist issues that one might perhaps have taken with a pinch of salt, had it not been for this crass and opportunistic commercialism.

Back from Canada, Mariam heads straight for Sahar's house in Alexandria, where she finds her friend madly in love with Hossam whom she has just married. The first confrontation between the two women is, in fact, one of the more successful scenes in the film, revealing the director's understanding of women's psychology in all its complexity. This talent, however, is totally absent from the subsequent exchanges of insults between the two, in which their characterisation rapidly slips out of focus. The film is long on the hilarious tricks they play on each other as they compete over the man they have both married. Things get completely out of hand when Mariam becomes pregnant and Sahar discovers she is infertile.

The reversal comes when Sahar has a car accident and, hanging between life and death, undergoes several revelations about the ugliness of her life and asks for a divorce. Mariam imagines that she can now have a healthy marriage with Hossam, only to discover, to her consternation, the kind of self-divided, weakling he is; she, too, then demands a divorce. The two women friends are reunited and the child is born in a scene charged with a symbolism which contrives to be both elegant and completely crass.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Wahib Nassar (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 23 April.

Ahmed Badawy (Jewelry) & Ahmed Ragab Sakr (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 April.

Maja Fredricsson (Installations)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 April.

Rehab Abdel-Rahim (Collages)
Indian Cultural Centre, 23 Talaat Harb, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. Until 25 April.

Jewelry Designs by Artists
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Until 25 April.
Silver and gold jewelery encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones designed by Italian painters and sculptors.

Rehab Abdel-Rehim (Decoupage)
Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. Until 25 April.

Christian de Portzampare (Architectonic Studies)
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 26 April.

Adli Rizkallah
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thu, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 6 May. Poetry evening on 28 April, 6.30pm.
Watercolours on paper.

Linda Cohn-Kobelecky (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 30 April.

Gerhard Altenbourg (Drawings, woodcuttings, watercolours and lithographes)
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, 8 Ismail Mohamed St, Zamalek. 7pm. Daily 10am-2pm & 4pm-7pm. Until 30 April.

Jack Kilby (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 7 May.
Works under the title Arab Jerusalem in the Shadows of the Noble Sanctuary.

David d'Agostino & Nazli Madkour
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Arts, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 10 May.
Installation with rope, nails, cloth and wall paintings from the former, 30 mixed media works exhibited under the collective title Palimpsest from the latter.

Abdel-Aal
Doroub Gallery, 4 Latin America St, Garden City. Tel 354 7951. Opening 29 April, until 12 May.
Paintings under the title Girls from Egypt.

Fathy Afifi (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Opening: 28 April, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 15 May.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

School of Senses
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 23 April, 6.30pm (with English subtitles).
The last, directed by Andras Solyom (1995), in the Hungarian Films series.

When Spring Comes Late
Japanese Cultural Centre, 105 Kasr El-Aini, Garden City. 23 April, 6pm.
Directed by Yoji Yamada (1970).

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
26 April, 7pm: Padre Padrone. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (1977).
29 April, 7pm: La Traviata. Zeffirelli's film version of Verdi's opera.

Al-Toq wal-Eswera (The Collar and the Bracelet)
Goethe Institute, as above. 28 April, 6.30pm.
Directed by Khairi Beshara and scripted by Yehia Azmy (1986).

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. With Arabic and English subtitles.
28 April, 4pm & 8pm: La Totale, directed by Claude Zidi.
29 April, 4pm & 8pm: Fantôme avec Chauffeur, directed by Gérard Oury.

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Dantella (Lace)
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Ahmed Ragab Sakr

El-Batal (The Hero)
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Mogrem Maa Martabet El-Sharaf (A Criminal with High Honours)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Sa'et El-Enteqam (Time of Revenge)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Tamania Wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Titanic
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. MGM Kolleyet Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Copland
Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Renaissance, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maadi. Tel 580 4039. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Air Force 1
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Contact
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

MUSIC

Al-Hanager String Orchestra
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 27 April, 8pm.
Compositions by Egyptian and international composers.

An Evening of Poetry, Music and Song
Oriental Hall, AUC, Main Campus, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. 28 April, 7.30pm.
Poems, accompanied by music (guitar, piano, violin, trumpet, bass) by AUC students and Robert Switzer, director, in memory of Tom Lemon.

Choral Concert
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 29 April, 8pm.
The Akhnaton Chamber Opera and Orchestra with the Cairo Choral Society perform Mozart's Requiem and Vesperae Solennes de Confessore, under the direction of Larry Catlin, with soloists Nivein Allouba, Mona Rafla, Mohamed Abul-Kheir, Raouf Zeidan and Ashraf Sweilem.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 23 April, 8pm.
Compositions by Handel, Mendelssohn, Dvorak and Bartok with German soloist and conductor Wolfgang Schneider.

Cairo Opera Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 24 April, 7pm.
Compositions by Khaled Shoukry and Sherif Mohieddin. Soloists Mohamed Hamdy (clarinet), Manal Mohieddin (harp) and Mamdouh El-Gibaly (lute), conducted by Nai Filev.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 25 April, 8pm.
Compositions by Chavez, Bizet and De Falla, with flute soloist Inas Abdel-Dayem and conductor Enrique Batiz.

Cairo Opera String Quartet
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 26 April, 8pm.

Arabic Music Ensemble & Religious Song Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 28 April, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

THEATRE

Storytelling
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind Al-Azhar Mosque, Al-Hussein. Tel 340 7001. 24-29 April, 8.30pm.
Sherine El-Ansari tells four stories from the One Thousand and One Nights.

Al-Tayeb Wal-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Alabanda
Al-Fardous Theatre, Al-Beouth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Walieddin, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

LECTURES

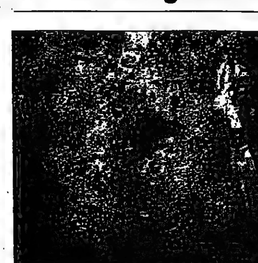
L'Evolution Politique de l'Egypte dans les Années 1990: Vers un Ajustement Structurel des Libertés?
CEDEJ, 14 Dr Abdel-Rahman Al-Sawi St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 28 April, 5pm.
Lecture in French by Dr Eberhard Kienle, CEDEJ-SOAS.

An evening with Salwa Bakr and Gamal El-Ghitani
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 575 9877. 29 April, 7pm.
The two writers narrate their experience with the public during their recent visit to Germany.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Hussein El-Ezabi

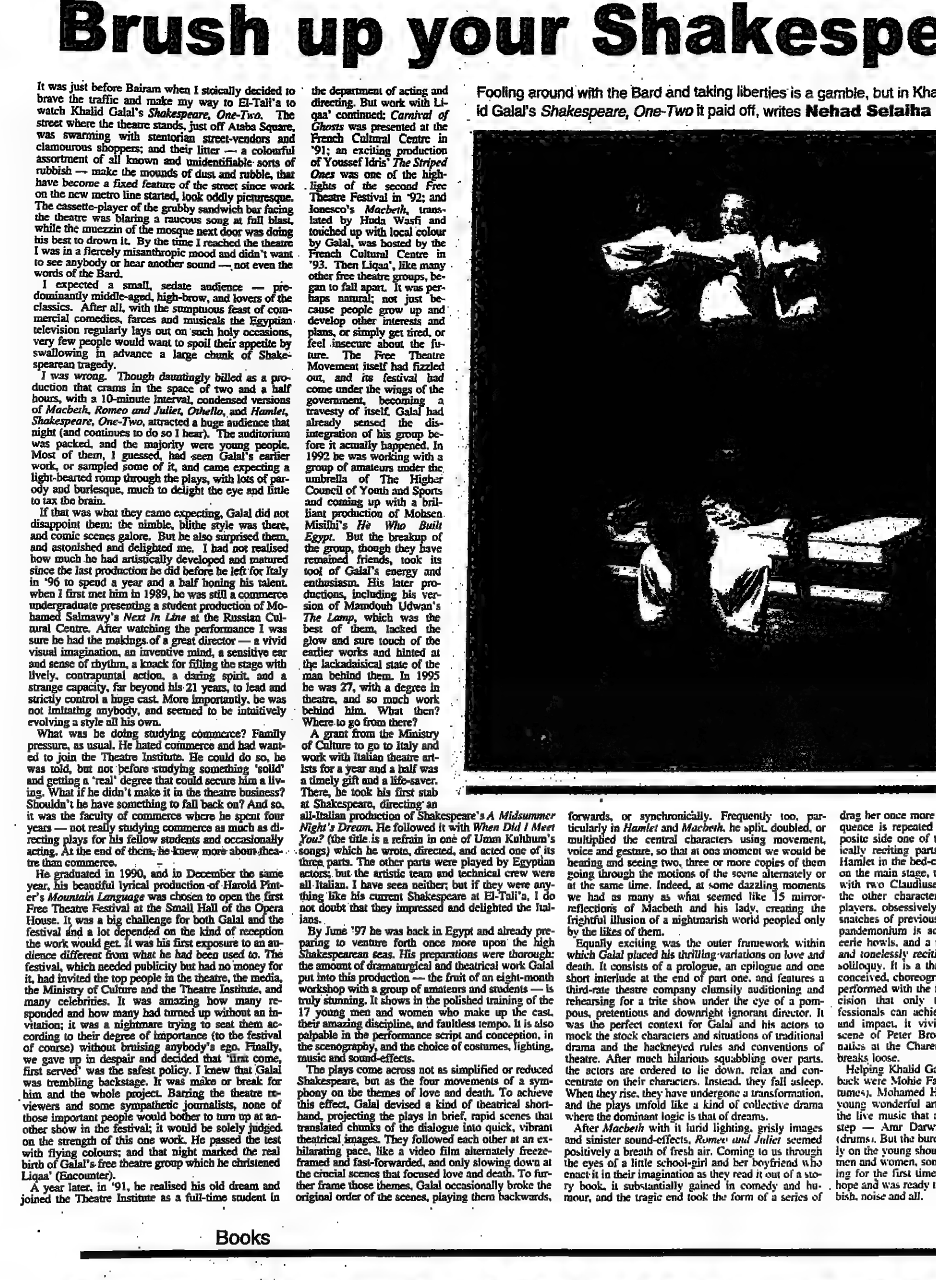
SCENES of the Nile and of Nature in Egypt is the title under which 24 artists exhibit their paintings and watercolours at **Picasso Gallery**. Worth noting are the symbolic interpretation of fishing by **Farouk Wagdi**, scenes of strange rock formations by **Fathi Ahmed**, caricatures by **Tad**, the miniature-like paintings of Upper Egyptian houses by **Ibrahim Ghazala** and the dramatic landscapes by **Omar Abdel-Zaher**.

Al-Hanager Gallery hosts works in a variety of media, 45 in all, by **Hussein El-Ezabi**. These very daringly incorporate such materials as glass, plastic and dried plants, enrichening an already richly textured canvas.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri

Brush up your Shakespeare

Fooling around with the Bard and taking liberties is a gamble, but in Khalid Galal's *Shakespeare, One-Two* it paid off, writes **Nehad Selaiha**



It was just before Bairam when I stoically decided to brave the traffic and make my way to El-Tali'a to watch Khalid Galal's *Shakespeare, One-Two*. The street where the theatre stands, just off Ataba Square, was swarming with stentorian street-vendors and clamourous shoppers; and their litter — a colourful assortment of all known and unidentifiable sorts of rubbish — make the mounds of dust and rubble, that have become a fixed feature of the street since work on the new metro line started, look oddly picturesque. The cassette-player of the grubby sandwich bar facing the theatre was blaring a raucous song at full blast, while the muezzin of the mosque next door was doing his best to drown it. By the time I reached the theatre I was in a fiercely misanthropic mood and didn't want to see anybody or hear another sound — not even the words of the Bard.

I expected a small, sedate audience — predominantly middle-aged, high-brow, and lovers of the classics. After all, with the sumptuous feast of commercial comedies, farces and musicals the Egyptian television regularly lays out on such holy occasions, very few people would want to spoil their appetite by swallowing in advance a large chunk of Shakespearean tragedy.

I was wrong. Though dauntingly billed as a production that crams in the space of two and a half hours, with a 10-minute interval, condensed versions of *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, *Shakespeare, One-Two*, attracted a huge audience that night (and continues to do so I hear). The auditorium was packed, and the majority were young people. Most of them, I guessed, had seen Galal's earlier work, or sampled some of it, and came expecting a light-hearted romp through the plays, with lots of parody and burlesque, much to delight the eye and little to tax the brain.

If that was what they came expecting, Galal did not disappoint them: the nimble, blithe style was there, and comic scenes galore. But he also surprised them, and astonished and delighted me. I had not realised how much he had artistically developed and matured since the last production he did before he left for Italy in '96 to spend a year and a half honing his talent. when I first met him in 1989, he was still a commerce undergraduate presenting a student production of Mohamed Salmawy's *Next In Line* at the Russian Cultural Centre. After watching the performance I was sure he had the makings of a great director — a vivid visual imagination, an inventive mind, a sensitive ear and sense of rhythm, a knack for filling the stage with lively, contrapuntal action, a daring spirit, and a strange capacity, far beyond his 21 years, to lead and strictly control a huge cast. More importantly, he was not imitating anybody, and seemed to be intuitively evolving a style all his own.

What was he doing studying commerce? Family pressure, as usual. He hated commerce and had wanted to join the Theatre Institute. He could do so, he was told, but not before studying something 'solid' and getting a 'real' degree that could secure him a living. What if he didn't make it in the theatre business? Shouldn't he have something to fall back on? And so, it was the faculty of commerce where he spent four years — not really studying commerce as much as directing plays for his fellow students and occasionally acting. At the end of them, he knew more about theatre than commerce.

He graduated in 1990, and in December the same year, his beautiful lyrical production of Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language* was chosen to open the first Free Theatre Festival at the Small Hall of the Opera House. It was a big challenge for both Galal and the festival and a lot depended on the kind of reception the work would get. It was his first exposure to an audience different from what he had been used to. The festival, which needed publicity but had no money for it, had invited the top people in the theatre, the media, the Ministry of Culture and the Theatre Institute, and many celebrities. It was amazing how many responded and how many had turned up without an invitation; it was a nightmare trying to seat them according to their degree of importance (to the festival of course) without bruising anybody's ego. Finally, we gave up in despair and decided that 'first come, first served' was the safest policy. I knew that Galal was trembling backstage. It was make or break for him and the whole project. Barring the theatre reviewers and some sympathetic journalists, none of those important people would bother to turn up at another show in the festival; it would be solely judged on the strength of this one work. He passed the test with flying colours; and that night marked the real birth of Galal's free theatre group which he christened Liqaa' (Encounter).

A year later, in '91, he realised his old dream and joined the Theatre Institute as a full-time student in the department of acting and directing. But work with Liqaa' continued: *Carnival of Ghosts* was presented at the French Cultural Centre in '91; an exciting production of Youssef Idris' *The Striped Ones* was one of the highlights of the second Free Theatre Festival in '92; and Ionesco's *Macbeth*, translated by Huda Wasfi and touched up with local colour by Galal, was hosted by the French Cultural Centre in '93. Then Liqaa', like many other free theatre groups, began to fall apart. It was perhaps natural; not just because people grow up and develop other interests and plans, or simply get tired, or feel insecure about the future. The Free Theatre Movement itself had fizzled out, and its festival had come under the wings of the government, becoming a travesty of itself. Galal had already sensed the disintegration of his group before it actually happened. In 1992 he was working with a group of amateurs under the umbrella of The Higher Council of Youth and Sports and coming up with a brilliant production of Mohsen Misilhi's *He Who Built Egypt*. But the breakup of the group, though they have remained friends, took its tool of Galal's energy and enthusiasm. His later productions, including his version of Mamdouh Udwan's *The Lamp*, which was the best of them, lacked the glow and sure touch of the earlier works and hinted at the lackadaisical state of the man behind them. In 1995 he was 27, with a degree in theatre, and so much work behind him. What then? Where to go from there?

A grant from the Ministry of Culture to go to Italy and work with Italian theatre artists for a year and a half was a timely gift and a life-saver. There, he took his first stab at Shakespeare, directing an all-Italian production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He followed it with *When Did I Meet You?* (the title is a refrain in one of Umm Kulthum's songs) which he wrote, directed, and acted one of its three parts. The other parts were played by Egyptian actors; but the artistic team and technical crew were all Italian. I have seen neither; but if they were anything like his current Shakespeare at El-Tali'a, I do not doubt that they impressed and delighted the Italians.

By June '97 he was back in Egypt and already preparing to venture forth once more upon the high Shakespearean seas. His preparations were thorough: the amount of dramaturgical and theatrical work Galal put into this production — the fruit of an eight-month workshop with a group of amateurs and students — is truly stunning. It shows in the polished training of the 17 young men and women who make up the cast, their amazing discipline, and faultless tempo. It is also palpable in the performance script and conception, in the scenography, and the choice of costumes, lighting, music and sound-effects.

The plays come across not as simplified or reduced Shakespeare, but as the four movements of a symphony on the themes of love and death. To achieve this effect, Galal devised a kind of theatrical shorthand, projecting the plays in brief, rapid scenes that translated chunks of the dialogue into quick, vibrant theatrical images. They followed each other at an exhilarating pace, like a video film alternately freeze-framed and fast-forwarded, and only slowing down at the crucial scenes that focused love and death. To further frame those themes, Galal occasionally broke the original order of the scenes, playing them backwards, forwards, or synchronically. Frequently too, particularly in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, he split, doubled, or multiplied the central characters using movement, voice and gesture, so that at one moment we would be hearing and seeing two, three or more copies of them going through the motions of the scene alternately or at the same time. Indeed, at some dazzling moments we had as many as what seemed like 15 mirror-reflections of Macbeth and his lady, creating the frightful illusion of a nightmarish world peopled only by the likes of them.

Equally exciting was the outer framework within which Galal placed his thrilling variations on love and death. It consists of a prologue, an epilogue and one short interlude at the end of part one, and features a third-rate theatre company clumsily auditioning and rehearsing for a trite show under the eye of a pompous, pretentious and downright ignorant director. It was the perfect context for Galal and his actors to mock the stock characters and situations of traditional drama and the hackneyed rules and conventions of theatre. After much hilarious squabbling over parts, the actors are ordered to lie down, relax and concentrate on their characters. Instead, they fall asleep. When they rise, they have undergone a transformation, and the plays unfold like a kind of collective drama where the dominant logic is that of dreams.

After *Macbeth* with it lurid lighting, grisly images and sinister sound-effects, *Romeo and Juliet* seemed positively a breath of fresh air. Coming to us through the eyes of a little school-girl and her boyfriend who enact it in their imagination as they read it out of a story book, it substantially gained in comedy and humour, and the tragic end took the form of a series of enchanting tableaux vivants, vaguely reminiscent of classical Italian painting. The same Italian spirit pervaded *Othello* which was also given as a daydream: but this time the dreamer was a bespectacled, excitable young female student, who as soon as she imaginatively stepped into the world of the play, text in hand, made it her business to prevent the tragedy by physically interfering in the action (getting occasionally knocked about by Othello) and vocally warning the characters. Her comments, actions and asides were a constant source of mirth. And yet the pathos and sense of tragedy remained.

The last movement was a harrowing *Hamlet* where love becomes a faint grotesque tune drowned by the thunderous laughs of death and the loud rattling of skulls. The chorus here is not a fussy do-gooder, or a romantic school-girl, but a macabre, deranged grave-digger who remains in full sight throughout, watching the characters rapaciously and ready to snatch them off at any moment. The extension to the stage, provided by set-designer Mohie Fahmi, (which consist of two platforms flanking the stage on either side, outside the proscenium arch, with steps leading down to a pit in front of the original stage, below audience level) was used to maximum effect in this part. When Opehlia drowns herself by jumping off the stage into the pit (which is carpeted blue), the grave-digger, who occupies the platform on the left (from the audience view), pounces on her and drags her up the steps to the grave he has been (almost erotically) digging. She resists, jumps off the platform, this time into the auditorium, not the pit, but he rushes down to drag her once more up the steps. This gruesome sequence is repeated over and over while at the opposite side one of the three Gertrudes sits mechanically reciting parts of Gertrude's exchanges with Hamlet in the bed-chamber scene. At the same time, on the main stage, the two other Gertrudes, together with two Claudiuses, two ghosts of King Hamlet, the other characters and the troupe of itinerant players, obsessively repeat, vocally and physically, snatches of previous scenes at a frenzied pace. This pandemonium is accompanied by wild drumming, eerie howls, and a mad voice-over (Galal's) loudly and tonelessly reciting, over and over, the "To be" soliloquy. It is a thrilling, haunting scene, superbly conceived, choreographed and orchestrated, and was performed with the fine split-second timing and precision that only the best of experienced professionals can achieve. In its polyphonic structure and impact, it vividly reminded me of the final scene of Peter Brook's *Marat-Sade* when the lunatics at the Charenton asylum run wild and hell breaks loose.

Helping Khalid Galal to make this glorious comeback were Mohie Fahmi (sets), Na'ima Agami (costumes), Mohamed Hussein (sound-effects), and two young wonderful artists who composed and played the live music that accompanied the actors at every step — Amr Darwish (violin) and Ahmed Sayed (drums). But the burden of the production fell squarely on the young shoulders of the 17 wonderful young men and women, some of whom are only 19 and acting for the first time. I left the theatre glowing with hope and was ready to embrace the whole world, rubbish, noise and all.

Plain Talk

An issue that keeps popping up from time to time is "do starving artists produce better art than the well-fed, well-dressed and well-looked after ones?" According to scholar Otto Erich Deutsch, the composers' net royalties from 1815-1827 amounted to approximately 687.50 sterling per annum. Compare this to any song album by, let us say, Elton John who, according to the latest figures, received 27 million sterling pounds for a new four-album deal.

It seems that when a song-writer makes it big these days, he does not simply earn a comfortable living, but finds himself in the company of millionaires. This, of course, is part of the comodification of culture and its annexation by multi-national corporations. Among other things, this means "that in the arts a bowling gap exists between the highly paid and the lowly paid... Breakthrough success is lavishly awarded, while those who still occupy the economic middle ground are becoming marginalised", according to Douglas Kennedy in the *Sunday Times*.

What is disheartening in all this, of course, is that the criteria for excellence have become so materialistic that the general standard of art works has gone down. The huge sums being dumped in the laps of so-called successes are prompting artists to ask whether too much money is dangerous for the artist, making them focus exclusively on the tastes of the marketplace. In the case of novelists, for example, the target is to get your novel turned into a film or TV serial.

The old notion that writers develop and mature through a fair period of time seems to be dying. Nowadays, large fortunes are made overnight. It is claimed that once a writer jumps into the million-pound-a-book-league. they will always be concentrating on the popular and often the vulgar. To justify the seven figure advance, says Kennedy, authors have to tailor their words to a mass audience. "Money", he goes on to say, "certainly can grant a writer considerable freedom — but it also imprisons him within market demand."

Kennedy gives some revealing comparisons between what successful first garnered in the past and what they get these days. In 1920, F Scott Fitzgerald received the equivalent of today's 41,000 sterling pounds for his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. In 1995, Nicholas Evans made 4.62 million from his first novel, *The Horse Whisper*. It is indeed encouraging to see that culture is getting its share of big money — but let it not be at the expense of quality.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

From Minya to Mukattam and back again

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews some of the more interesting titles to have appeared last month

***Al-Hamla Al-Firinsiya... Tanwir Am Tazwir?* (The French Expedition: Enlightenment Or Falsification?), Leila Enan. Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1998**

With her latest book, "The French Expedition: Enlightenment Or Falsification?", Dr Leila Enan participates in the raging debate among intellectuals of all hues about the centennial celebrations of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt.

From the start, the author makes no secret of her opposition to this invasion which hardly bothered to mask its colonial intentions. What makes this book a fascinating read is the angle Enan has chosen: the French myths that evolved around the expedition. Her primary sources, therefore, are mostly French ones. One of the key-myths which this book deconstructs is that of the expedition as a harbinger of modernity, rationality and enlightenment.

***Shi'ir Omar Ibn Al-Fared... Dirasa Isloubiya* (The Poetry of Omar Bin Al-Fared: A Stylistic Study), Ramadan Sadeq. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1998**

Omar Bin Al-Fared, known to Egyptians as "the sultan of lovers", was a Sufi poet who lived in the 7th century AH. His tomb at the foot of the Muqattam Hill is at the centre of a widely attended moulid.

In this volume, Ramadan Sadeq analyses the poetry of Omar Ibn Al-Fared. The introduction sets Ibn Al-Fared's sufism in its political, social and psychological context. In the three following chapters, the author tackles the music, structure and imagery of Ibn Al-Fared's poetry. The volume certainly bears out Sadeq's promise that he will steer clear from subjective value judgments in favour of methodological rigour.

***Al-Ma'loumatiya Ba'd Al-Internet... Tariq Al-Mustaqbal* (*The Road Ahead*), Bill Gates, tr Abdel-Salam Radwan. Kuwait: Alam Al-Ma'rifa, 1998**

Bill Gates who dropped out of Harvard to establish Microsoft and is now considered one of the key-figures in the computer world, draws on his autobiography in this volume to chart the past and the future of the information highway.

***Al-Sinama Wal-Siyasa* (Cinema and Politics), Ali Abu Shadi. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1998**

In exploring the relationship between politics and Egyptian cinema, film critic Ali Abu Shadi focuses on the past turbulent years of Egyptian history. He addresses the public sector production experience in Egyptian cinema, explores the impact of Nasser's death on cinema, demonstrates that the 1973 war hatched third-rate films, analyses the cinematic treatment of terrorism, espionage and the 1977 bread riots and, in the last chapter, looks into films that became the subject of law-suits.

***Al-Tanawu' Al-Bashari Al-Khallaq... Taqrir Al-Lagna Al-'Alamiya Lil-Thaqafa Wal-Tanmiya* (*Our Creative Diversity: Report of the International Committee for Culture and Development*), tr Mohamed Yehia, Mona Mo'nis et al. Cairo: The Supreme Council for Culture, 1998**

In December 1992, the International Committee for Culture and Development was formed in the context of the international decade for cultural development. The report in hand, which is the work of dozens of experts from India, Norway, France, Senegal, Canada, Spain, Holland and Switzerland, is the product of the committee's work since then.

In its recommendations for cultural mobilisation in the new millennium, the report does not mince its words about the grass-roots problems — poverty, unemployment, ignorance, disease — that impede development, as well as cultural attitudes that contribute to these problems.

***Al-A'mal Al-Kamla* (The Complete Works), Shawqi Abdel-Hakim. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1998**

Known primarily as a distinguished scholar of folklore and ethnography, Shawqi Abdel-Hakim is also a novelist and playwright. This, the third volume of his complete works, comprises 10 texts, ranging in genre from novellas to one-act plays.

***Al-Muthaqafoun* (Intellectuals), Paul Johnson, tr Talaat El-Shayeb. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1998**

In this iconoclastic book, Paul Johnson deconstructs the contribution to the cultural conscience of the West made by dozens of thinkers, philosophers, writers and artists — including Rousseau, Marx, Shelley, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Russell and Orwell, among others. Original as his critique may be, Johnson nevertheless sometimes goes overboard in dethroning figures who have undoubtedly stood for laudable moral values and beauty.

***Misr Lil-Masriyin* (Egypt for the Egyptians), Selim Khalil El-Naqash. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1998**

During the Orabi Uprising, a journalist called Selim El-Naqash was dispatched by his newspaper to Alexandria to cover the events. The reports he provided are thus of dual importance: they are both contemporary to the events and day-to-day eyewitness accounts. Although this volume of the chronicle was originally labelled Part 5, it can be considered the second volume, for volumes 1, 2 and 3 have disappeared from all libraries.

This volume takes us from the massacre, via the Bombardment of Alexandria to the fire in the city, stopping before the Battle of Tel El-Kebir.

***Muzakarat Al-Rahhala 'Aan Masr Wal-Misriyin* (Observations on the Manners and Customs of Egyptians), John Antes, tr Sayed Ahmed El-Ansari. Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 1998**

British traveller John Antes arrived in Egypt in the winter of 1770, with the intention of spreading Protestantism among the Copts. After visiting Minya, where there was the biggest concentration of Copts, he retired to Cairo, where he wrote his memoirs in German. He was to remain in Egypt for 12 years.

Antes re-emerged again in 1804 when the British authorities asked him to compile a report on Egypt for the purposes of the Frazer expedition. Antes' memoirs, rewritten in English, are the text that has been translated here by Sayed Ahmed El-Ansari. As El-Ansari says, this comprehensive, if not entirely objective, portrait of conditions in Egypt at the time, while hardly diverting, is very revelatory about the sorry state of affairs in the country.

***Al-A'mal Al-Kamla Li Mikhail Roman* (The Complete Works of Mikhail Roman), vol III, Mikhail Roman. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1998**

The two editors of the "Complete Works of Mikhail Roman", Farouk Abdel-Wahab and Hazem Shehata, are to be congratulated on the thoroughness of their research into the late playwright's literary legacy, particularly so given that most of his plays were banned by the censor. This third volume of his works includes *Al-Ma'gour* (The Mercenary), an unpublished play, performed for one night only, *Al-Naml Wal-Nizam* (Ants and Order), a previously unknown play which the researches found among Roman's papers, and *Al-Zugag* (Glass), first published and performed in 1968.

Robbing wise men of their reason

In the second part of her article, **Zeinab Radwan** *explains why context is crucial to interpreting religious law on the matter of women's right to act as judges*

The *hadith* on which many religious scholars base their belief that women may not be admitted to the judiciary was delivered on one of the two feasts. The incident begins with the Prophet urging women to give alms. But then he tells them that, perceiving the inhabitants of hell, he noticed that the majority were women. The Prophet was in the habit of speaking humorously but fully. Al-Tirmidhi states in *Al-Shama'il*: "He (the Prophet) said to [a woman], 'You are old.' She replied, 'Oh Prophet of God, pray God that He may let me into Paradise.' He said, 'Mother of so and so, no old woman will enter Paradise.' On hearing this, the woman wailed. The Prophet of God said, 'She will not enter Paradise as an old woman, for God Almighty has "Made them virgin-pure (and undefiled), beloved (by nature), equal in age".' (*Surat Al-Waqi'a, verses 36-37*).

The Prophet then said in amazement, "I have never seen anybody deficient in mind and religious devotion more capable of robbing a wise man of his reason than you women." In other words, God has seen fit to place strength in what appears weak, and weakness in what seems strong. The Prophet's *hadith* is simply a warning to women, telling them that, seeing that God has given them the power to rob wise men of their good judgement — despite their weakness — they must fear God, and not use this power except in doing good. It is clear that the *hadith* about women being deficient in mind and devotion was pronounced only once, with the purpose of drawing women's attention to the importance of commendable behaviour. It is not applicable out of context as a statement addressed to either men or women.

The Prophet's reference to mental deficiency as grounds for equating the testimony of two women with that of one man in matters regarding a future debt (*Surat Al-Baqara*, verse 282), may be addressed briefly as follows. In the context of a future debt, testimony would be required at some time in the future, hence the prescription of two women witnesses is justified on the grounds that one would complement the testimony of another in case of lapse of memory. It must be noted that women were largely illiterate at the time. In testifying, a woman would rely on recollection of what happened, and this would be compared with the written document of the debt written or dictated in her presence. The case can be made, that there would have been no need to rely on memory if writing was possible. A literate witness's signature on a document would have been sufficient proof of its validity and its concordance with the facts.

In contesting the above, it may be asked why is it assumed that a male witness would necessarily be literate. The answer is that in commercial dealings, particularly in transactions concerning debts (incurred during a journey, for instance), women were not normally present; such matters were concluded among males. Women engaged in commercial activities had to delegate men to manage debt affairs. Men were therefore assumed to be more knowledgeable than women of such matters. Hence, the reference to women in *Surat Al-Baqara* reflects the social environment of women at the time: mostly illiterate, and rarely involved in business or financial dealings. The image of women derived from the *sura* is only circumstantial and contextual, however, and does not constitute a foundation for inference or prohibition in other contexts. We should bear in mind that no valid *hadith*, incident, or written text related to the Prophet or the *sahaba* (companions) has ever been found which supports this view of women.

Women are obligated to abide by the precepts of religion, and are subject to criminal and civil liability on an equal footing with men. The basis for obligation and liability is women's full mental capacity, for otherwise they would neither have been obligated nor held liable.

In this context, we must seek to understand the amicable and pleasant tone of the Prophet in addressing women. We should refrain from drawing conclusions out of context which undermine the status of women and accuse women of deficiency in religious devotion and mental capacity. We need only to recall the wisdom of *Umm* Salma, who advised the Prophet in the peace agreement in Al-Hudaybiya, which served to reunite the Muslims and invoked the words "We have granted you a manifest victory..." (*Surat Al-Fateh*, verses 1-3).

There are examples of women who pledged their allegiance to the Prophet along with their husbands in Al-Aqaba. *Umm* Emara Al-Ansariya stood steadfastly at the Prophet's side in the battle of Uhud, while hundreds of men fled for their lives. *Umm* Salim Bint Miljan was a model of wisdom and insight, who also stood steadfastly in Jenin while men ran to safety. *Al-Ahfa'* Bint Abdallah was consulted by Umar Ibn Al-Khattab and he acted according to her advice. Examples abound, therefore, of women's courage and sagacity during the Muslim community's early years.

An objective view of women, therefore, is all that is needed to correct misconceptions barring women from the bench.

We now turn to the designation of women as "deficient in their religious devotion", a designation based on the specific days on which women break the fast and refrain from prayer. Devotion, faith and Islam are one. Obedience to religious precepts is designated as "faith" and "devotion". He who observes the precepts of worship scrupulously is more faithful and devout than one whose observance is more lax.

Deficiency in religious devotion may be a sin if one neglects prayer, fasting, or other obligatory rituals of worship without a valid justification. But a deficiency in religious devotion may not constitute a sin, for instance in the case of failure to participate in the Friday prayer. Are men who fail to comply with religious precepts for a valid reason to be described as deficient in their religious devotion? No one has ever cited this justification to prove that men are not qualified to become judges. The same applies to women by analogy. A person may be obligated to refrain from rituals of worship by divine command, as is the case for menstruating women who are commanded to refrain from prayer and fasting. How can women be accused of being deficient in their devotion if they are only obeying God's command? Is obedience to *Shari'a* a deficiency in religious devotion?

We may conclude that the *hadith* regarding women's deficiency in mind and religious devotion is not considered by the majority of jurists as constituting grounds to disqualify women from holding positions in the judiciary.

As for the opinion of the majority of jurists that a judge needs to mix with other men in their capacities as opponents or witnesses, while women may not for fear of being tempted to stray, we may argue that temptation is only a threat when a woman is alone with a man who is not a *mihrim* (i.e., belonging to the category of persons whom a woman cannot marry, such as the father, brother, uncle, etc.). In discharging the responsibilities of the bench, a woman does not need to be in such contact with a stranger. The biographies of the Prophet and his companions are full of examples of Muslim women engaging in all sorts of activities outside the home, in the mosque, educational institutions, on the pilgrimage, in *jihad*, in advocating the good and prohibiting evil, at weddings, in banquets, ceremonies and other celebrations, as witnesses, litigants, offenders subjected to penalties...

By definition, bearing witness implies reporting what has been perceived. A testimony begins with the assertion of perception thus, "I bear witnesses..." or "I have witnessed..." Bearing witness is an individual obligation (*fard 'ain*) to establish the truth of what has been perceived. A testimony safeguards against the loss of some right; but a testimony is an obligation even if it is susceptible to cause the loss of a right. Muslims are commanded to "Conceal not evidence, for whoever conceals it, his heart is tainted with sin" (*Surat Al-Baqara*, verse 283), and to "Establish the evidence before God" (*Surat Al-Talaq*, verse 2).

Ibn Al-Qayem discussed this question in *I'lam Al-Mowaqi'in* and concluded that Qur'anic texts and the saying of the Prophet acknowledge women's testimony in all domains. In the context of the two verses in *Surat Al-Ma'ida* and *Surat Al-Talaq*, he argues that the testimony of two women is considered two complete testimonies.

The fact that the only requirement of a witness is to be Muslim constitutes evidence supporting women's testimony in cases involving *hudud* and other crimes.

Abu Dawud and Al-Tirmidhi narrate that, according to Umar Ibn Shua'ib, who reported from his father that his grandfather had heard the Prophet denounce the testimony of a traitor, one nurturing hostility and envy towards a brother, and one who is a dependent for his livelihood on the household. But the testimony of all others was accepted. In another version, the Prophet rejected the testimony of a traitor and the testimony of an adulterer or adulteress. Abu Dawud added that the testimony of a bedouin against a villager is illegal. It is therefore clear that a woman to whom the above qualifications do not apply can give valid testimony.

The main issue here is that no categorical prohibition derived from logical reasoning bans women from assuming positions in the judiciary.

Finally, gender equality must be considered the fundamental assumption guiding the law in this respect, unless there is adequate evidence that certain functions are designated specifically for either men or women. Whatever the case may be, the functions of a judge do not carry greater responsibility than the pronouncing of *fatwas* on religious matters, interpretation, transcription and narration of religious texts, which have all been performed by women since the days of the *sahaba*.

The writer is dean of Cairo University's Dar Al-Ulum (Fayoum branch).

War on women

FOUR years before the 1956 Constitution granted women the right to vote, writes Fayza Hassan, religious scholars were earnestly explaining why the mission of wife and mother was far more important than political participation

On 20 June 1952, *Al-Mussawar* ran a full-page article titled "Egyptian Women and the Right to Vote". The subtitle proclaimed that eleven Islamic organisations were about to declare war on women.

"On the occasion of Women's Week, the *Fatwa* Council of Al-Azhar declared that women have no right to participate in public affairs. Furthermore, eleven Islamic organisations spoke out, justifying and condoning this opinion."

In June 1952, representatives of the eleven Islamic organisations which formed the General Union of Islamic Institutions called for a conference which was attended by thousands of citizens from the cities and provinces, to discuss women's right to vote, to be elected as members of parliament and to participate actively in the political life of their country.

The speakers overwhelmiogly found that the foreign occupation was responsible for demands that bordered on the lunatic, they said, and definitely did not stem from the will of reasonable, faithful Muslim women who knew their religion.

Women, the speakers contended, had sacred duties to fulfil: serving their husbands and raising healthy generations of sons who would serve the nation.

At a time when the country was fighting for its independence, the enemy had inspired some women of little prudence to put forward these demands, as a ruse to deter Egyptian citizens from their effort to liberate their land. Neither physical strength nor political wisdom had been bestowed on women to allow them to play a role in public life. The measure of intelligence that they commanded was better put to the service of their households: these were the arguments unanimously expressed in the fiery discourses of the participants.



The June 1952 conference. Representatives of eleven Islamic organisations debated women's political participation

To illustrate the point that one could find proof of women's inherent deficiencies in sources besides the Qur'an, Dr Mohamed Youssef Moussa, head of the Front of Al-Azhar Scholars, commented that the Greeks had denied them all the rights enjoyed by men. He also cited Aristotle and Ibn Sina, expressing the belief that "women were weak and prone to submit readily to their whims".

Islamic history, he admitted, had witnessed examples of women versed in jurisprudence, the sayings of the Prophet, and literature, but no mention was ever made of a woman occupying a public post or even attending a single consultative council at any time. This absence, he emphasised, confirmed the wisdom of the early Muslims' convictions and customs.

Speaking for Al-Gam'iya Al-Shar'iya (the Legal Association), Ahmed Issa Ashour explained the rights and duties of women and the specific circumstances in which they were considered legally equal to men. He also offered the attentive audience "the opinion of Dr Doriya Shafiq on the subject [of women's right to vote], an opinion which she apparently held before she became the champion of this right".

According to Ashour, at one point in her life Shafiq had stated: "Egyptian women have failed in the realm of politics because they lack the physical and mental qualities necessary to succeed in this field. I believe that women should limit themselves to the mission for which they were created, namely looking after the home, serving their husbands and raising their children properly. I do not condone Egyptian women's political demands, such as the right to vote and to be elected to the Constituent Assembly, because these matters should concern only men."

Ashour concluded: "We do not know what Dr Doriya now thinks of this former opinion of hers, or whether it really is a former opinion!"



Bitter-sweet memories

She remembers a particular Easter holiday vividly. She sees herself, a little girl at boarding school, standing at the window of the dormitory watching the stream of parents coming to collect their children for the break. There were shouts of joy, hugs and kisses. Her classmates were coming out, dragging suitcases heavy with their winter clothes. Anxiety bit at her heart. Nowhere, among the mothers, could she spot her own, who usually stood out in any crowd because of her stature and elegance.

She had known her mother to be late, but, more disturbingly, she remembered many instances when she had not come at all. On these occasions, she had stayed in the deserted school, under the supervision of the cook and the old janitor who slept all day in the shade, neglecting his duties.

She thought about the last time it had happened, when, to entertain herself, she had drawn a sort of calendar on the window pane and every morning erased the days remaining from the holidays until it was time for the students to come back. She had lied to them, of course, and told them in detail about the wonderful holidays in Alexandria with her mother, the fish restaurants and the rides in the horse-drawn carriages along the corniche at sunset. She was not really committing a sin, she had told herself then. Her mother had taken her to Alexandria the previous year and she had only changed the time of the event, not the event itself. She had actually been careful not to add any imaginary embellishments to the episode... Maybe she should start thinking of what she would say this time.

She went down the stairs slowly, hoping against hope that, when she reached the courtyard, her mother would be standing there like an apparition. The playground was quite empty. The last carriages had gone, bearing the other girls to happy homes and festive family reunions.

Since her father's death, she had been alone with her mother, and she understood that it had been hard on the young widow to bear the responsibility of a child alone. Her mother had told her that she would always be safe at the school. Still, at times she felt awfully lonely. At night she prayed for her mother. What if she died too? She would be left all alone in the world. When such thoughts visited her she would break out in a cold sweat. Her heart would pound madly, so hard in fact that she feared the noise would wake up the girl in the bed next to hers. Tonight she needn't harbour such fears. The dormitory would be quite empty.

At noon, she went to claim her lunch at the school kitchen. Cook, obviously miffed at having to stay at the school to take care of a single student, grouchily handed her a plate of cold meat and vegetables, left over from yesterday's dinner. She ate in silence and wondered what she would do with the long hours that stretched in front of her like a limitless desert.

After lunch, she sat on the steps leading to the dormitory, observing the play of the shadows on the tiles of the hall below. Suddenly she noticed something unusual: on the small table in the corner, half concealed by the wrought-iron bannister, there was a large cardboard box, like the ones her mother usually bought at Groppi's to offer her friends for the feast. One of the mothers must have brought it and distributed the sweets among her daughter's friends. Though she was sure the box must be empty, she decided to check. One never knows, she thought. To her utter surprise, the box was almost half full. She debated for a while about her right to help herself. What would her mother say? The box lay there, going to waste, while its spoiled owner was eating her fill of holiday treats, she was sure.

Finally, she made up her mind and, snatching the box, took it to the dormitory. She sat on her bed and carefully counted the days left until school resumed. There were six in all. Carefully, she selected six sweets — the largest — and arranged them on her bed. She then returned the box to the table. Maybe Cook or the lazy janitor would find it and take it away. No one would know about the six missing sweets. The days passed quickly from that moment on, and she no longer minded the boredom, because she knew that, at night, when the lights were turned off, she would place one of the sweets in her mouth and let it melt deliciously while she slowly drifted to sleep, dreaming that she was at home with her mother, having tea and cake.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chicken with mushrooms

Ingredients:
4 chicken breast fillets
2 tsp oyster sauce
2 tsp soy sauce
2 tsp cornflour
1 tsp olive oil
3 spring onions (cut in 3 cm lengths)
1 onion (wedged)
125 gms button mushrooms (canned)
2 tbsp corn oil
Pepper + allspice (no salt)

Method:
Cut chicken into strips. Combine with spices, sauces, cornflour and olive oil. Mix well and let stand 20 minutes. Heat half the corn oil in a pan. Add all onions and cook until tender. Stir in mushrooms. Toss over high heat for one minute. Remove from pan. Add remaining corn oil to pan. Stir in chicken mixture and cook over high heat until golden brown. Return mushrooms to pan and cook for one minute more to heat through. Serve with buttered pasta, parmesan cheese and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The ink blot test

Andrew Steele gives the correct response

It is the last thing one expects when dining out in Cairo, to be subjected to an immense and worrying Rorschach test for the duration of one's meal. But such is the unnerving experience that awaits the callow diner at Prestige in Mohandessin, for although the pavement terrace may be airy and the pizzeria bright and bouncy, the otherwise well-appointed interior of the à la carte (and decidedly upmarket) restaurant area boasts wallpaper that will have you in complexes before you can say fish course. The prints of Edwardian Britain, dark wood and brass, sit uneasily with this Freudian festival, but the lighting is suitably low, the service suitably silver. We perused the extensive menu which contains a eclectic selection of what, I suppose, would call itself "international fare" — a mixture of Italian, Oriental and more than a passing nod to the French. The pasta and pizza menu is available upon request.

We deigned to start with salads: a Roosevelt for me, a Carpaccio di Mozzarella for Mohamed. Disappointingly, the Roosevelt salad did not contain morsels of disemboweled (and indeed exhumed) ex-president, but rather a trio of juicy plum tomatoes stuffed with marinated mushrooms, onion and orange. Heavily and pleasingly dosed with fresh black pepper, the ingredients complemented each other surprisingly well, the mushrooms and onion adding a savoury bite. A very American dish, and carried out without flaw. The mozzarella was as good as it should have been: bottomed with tomato slices and topped with good olive oil, the only sad mistake being the substitution of a sprig of mint for a sprig of basil. Still, the cheese itself was topping good quality and nice and fresh.

For the main course, Mohamed ploughed his vegetarian way through a very competent *Spaghetti Arrabiata*. Superb al dente pasta with a thick ragout of black and green olives, onion, tomato and lots of chili. A classic, simple dish, and carried out with some flair.

And now for the party piece. Prestige offer a good range of flambéd meats, cooked at the table with much fire and brimstone. I plumped for that hoary old staple of the well-to-do brasserie, the ubiquitous Steak Diane, listed here as fillet Diana (cue tasteless Princess of Wales joke). The burner was ushered to our corner and ingredients assembled. The quivering fleshy mound that was presented to me for approval looked liked it might go down a treat. I was not disappointed. First the meat was rubbed with wine and then browned and flambéd with a generous measure of cognac. Saucy ingredients were then blended, and the whole left to reduce while the vegetables and fries were assembled. The meat cut like butter and the sauce was the stuff that dreams are made of. Accompanied by crisp fresh vegetables and proper thick-cut chips, the dish was carried off with finesse.

A filling and fancy meal is to be had at the Prestige, a real restaurant that's well worth a visit. Dinner for two with two Stellas came to a reasonable LE107. No extra charge for Dr Rorschach's opinion.

Prestige, 43 Gezirat Al-Arab Street, off Gam'at Al-Dowal Al-Arabiyya, Mohandessin. Tel: 3470383

Al-Ahram Weekly

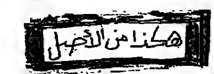
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

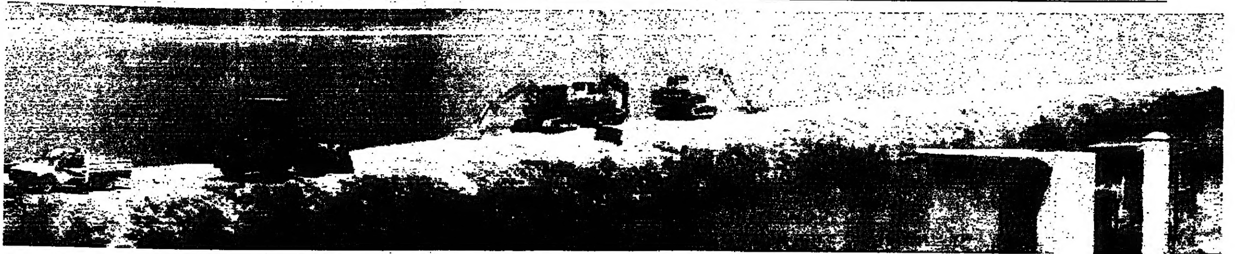
ACROSS
1. Whisk; besom (5)
6. Dialogue (4)
10. A small merganser (4)
14. Copy, sl. (5)
15. Subtle emanation (4)
16. Commotion, hyph. wds (4)
17. Complete (10)
19. Fad; fume; seethe (4)
20. Short for Bell's invention (3)
21. Dutch knife (4)
22. Surfaces; smoothes (6)
24. A small coin (4)
25. Devise new word (4)
26. Rolls 95)
28. Metaphor; fable (8)
32. Mulcts (5)
33. Large genus of bitter herbs (4)
34. Pigmented layer of the eye (4)
35. Like the Gobi desert (4)
36. Brightness (5)
37. Connection (4)
38. Frontier; allocate (4)
39. Byway 94)
40. Assemblies; stripes (5)
41. Having few teeth (8)
43. Parents (5)
44. Ditty (4)
45. Judge's dress (4)
46. Awake memories of (6)
49. Sailor's cry (4)
50. Depot, abb. (4)
53. Solo song (4)
54. Got the idea (10)
57. Ring the bell (4)
58. Miss Doolittle (4)
59. Crazed; choleric (5)
60. Requests (4)
61. French summers (4)
62. Classes; inclinations (5)

DOWN
1. Unsweetened (4)
2. M. Coty (4)
3. Milky gemstone (4)
4. Celestial body (3)
5. Mouthfuls (7)
6. A younger son (5)
7. Gargantuan (4)
8. Surface measure equal to 100 sq. m. (3)
9. Larvae of amphibians (8)
10. Prevent circulation by compression (11)
11. Lament; keen (4)
12. Boundary (4)
13. Miseries (4)
18. Travelers' accommodation houses (4)
23. Recline (3)
24. Letter of introduction, passport, deed, et al (11)
25. Near; conclude; bolt (5)
26. Put a match to (5)
27. Stick together (5)
28. Solitary (5)
29. Like sheep (5)
30. Tears to bits and pieces (5)
31. Chatters; Tibetan oxen (4)
32. Stardom; distinction (4)
33. Having wing like appendages (5)
36. Small secretory organ (8)
40. Care of children during parents; absence (7)
42. Large wine cask (3)
43. Secure ship (4)
45. Ratite birds resembling ostrich (5)
46. New Zealand tree with crimson flowers (4)
47. God of love (4)
48. Decant; exploit; chief ingredient of posset (4)
49. Tool to cut away surface of wood (4)
50. Cleaning necessity (4)
51. Wield heavy load (4)
52. Suffix forming nouns, pl. (4)
55. Egg of parasitic insect (3)
56. Make an effort (3)

Last week's solution



Yesterday, the world marked Earth Day. In Egypt, efforts to preserve and upgrade the environment continue, although it is often an uphill battle



Other fish in the sea

As the world seeks to preserve fresh water resources, Lake Mariut, once Egypt's largest natural lake, is being depleted rapidly. **Sherine Nasr** investigates attempts to reverse the process

"There used to be enough fish for everyone. Those were good days. We never worried about what tomorrow would bring, and life was much easier." *Amm* Mohamed, a fisherman like his father, has spent his lifetime on and around Lake Mariut.

The community of fishermen numbers about 7,000. Lake Mariut is their home, and their livelihood. "This is where we were born and raised. This is where our grandfathers lived and died," says *Amm* Mohamed.

Lake Mariut, south-east of Alexandria, is over 6,000 years old. It was once the largest of the four shallow, naturally formed Delta lakes on the Mediterranean coast. Today, it is the smallest.

"There was only ever fresh, sweet water in Lake Mariut. It was fed from ground water sources and the canals that used to connect it to the Nile." Ahmed Abdel-Rehim, remote sensing specialist at CEDARE (the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe), may be a member of the scientific community, but he is just as distressed as the fishermen. Water is one of humanity's most precious resources, and here, it is receding — fast.

According to Abdel-Rehim, Lake Mariut is the reason why Alexander the Great chose this particular spot on the Mediterranean to construct Alexandria. "Lake Mariut made the site strategically very interesting. An international port on the Mediterranean was built, and the fresh-water lake beside it enhanced the opportunity of stable agricultural activities. Small communities settled around the lake and the features of an integrated city started to materialise," he explains.

When Alexander first saw it, the lake covered approximately 700 square kilometres. Until the 12th century, it was an important port in its own right.

It was only during the early 20th century that the water quality began to deteriorate. "Now we have a salt-water lagoon of only 70 square kilometres. The smell is the first thing that hits those heading for Alexandria," says Abdel-Rehim.

For the past thirty years, the lake has deteriorated progressively. It was identified as one of Egypt's seven "black spot" bodies of water in the country's 1992 National Environment Action Plan.

Lake Mariut has fallen victim to a conflict of interests. The stakeholders are emerging industries, the Alexandria governorate, the city's Sanitary Drainage Organisation, the Ministry of Public Works and Irrigation, the Syndicate of Fishermen... These and others are in a heated race to get what they consider their fair share of the lake. "Everybody wants to exploit it, but the interests are in complete conflict," Abdel-Rehim comments.

A clear example of possible conflict is the battle between the fishing community and the Ministry of Public Works and Irrigation. The fishermen have repeatedly demanded that the water level be raised in order to improve their catch, but the ministry's policy has been exactly the opposite. "The ministry wants Lake Mariut to work as a back-up [catchment] system in case of flash flooding," explains a ministry official.

In 1992, one such flash flood inundated all the neighbouring villages. The only solution proposed at the time was to drain the water into the lake. Since then, the ministry has always been careful to keep the water level very low. "The fishermen's livelihood has been greatly affected because of something that may or may not occur in 50 years," comments Abdel-Rehim.

But the fishermen are not the only ones suffering. Over 40 factories operate around the lake. "Untreated industrial waste is dumped into the lake," says environmentalist Magdi Allam. According to CEDARE's most recent findings, 180 tons of industrial pollutants on average are discharged into the lake every day.

The Alexandria governorate, meanwhile, dumps 122.6 tons of Alexandria sanitary drainage every day," notes Abdel-Rehim.

Refuse collected from the city, moreover, is dumped on the shore and left to rot.

Much of the lake has also been filled in to allow for agricultural expansion and the construction of roads. Moreover, as irrigation systems are modernised, chemicals and pesticides are finding their way into the water, throwing the ecosystem off balance. "Six million cubic metres of agricultural drainage water are dumped into the lake every day," according to a report by CEDARE.

"All these factors have led to an irreversible process of deterioration," says Abdel-Rehim.

The lake is now divided into four main basins. One of these, allocated to the fishermen, is only 4.2 square kilometres in surface.

According to a review published last January in *National Geographic* magazine, many of the 47 commercial fish species that once thrived in the Lake have disappeared. "The average catch has declined from 11,000 in 1976 to 2,000 in 1992. The value of the catch has also plummeted, because no one wants to buy contaminated fish," explains Abdel-Rehim.

Pollution, of course, has all but eliminated the sole source of livelihood for a community of once self-supporting fishermen. Now unemployed, many of them also "suffer from one or more diseases. Their hands are blotchy and swollen because of repeated exposure to the toxic brew in Lake Mariut," the CEDARE report warns.

The impact of pollution on Lake Mariut, furthermore, far surpasses narrow local boundaries. "The lake is very significant to birds migrating from western Europe. Two-thirds of the bird species recorded in Egypt migrating from Europe stop at the lake. It serves as a major stop-over site and wintering area for hundreds of thousands of water birds," notes Mindi Bahaaeddin, an avid bird-watcher.

"Although it is difficult to estimate exactly how many of these birds are able to continue their journey southward, a great number certainly die because of the pollution," adds Abdel-Rehim.

It was only a year ago that CEDARE, in collaboration with METAP (Mediterranean Environmental Technological Assistance Programme) and the IAE (International Academy of the Environment) decided to launch a comprehensive plan to upgrade Lake Mariut. "It was essential to gather all the conflicting stakeholders and try to help them figure out means to create an environmental management plan for the lake, each in his own field," says Abdel-Rehim.

Public hearings were arranged, main problems were highlighted and a unified strategy to save the lake was defined and agreed upon. "At present, the Fisheries Authority is dredging the bottom of the lake to improve the water quality and increase the water level," he elaborates. These efforts have been welcomed enthusiastically by the fishermen, whose productivity will be improved by higher water levels.

As for the Alexandria General Organisation for Sanitary Drainage, it has suggested six alternatives to dumping the city's sewage into the Lake. "The sewage now receives primary and secondary treatment before being dumped. Discussions of how to use the water for agricultural purposes are also ongoing," says Abdel-Rehim.

The Alexandria governorate is now asking all new investors along the lake to provide an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) before it approves their projects, while the Ministry for Environmental Affairs is urging the 40 existing factories to abide by the criteria set down in the Environment Law (Law 4/1994). "Alexandria University is working on a water modeling system to determine the water quality in the Lake," Abdel-Rehim notes.

These are the elements of the unified strategy. "It may not be the best ever, but it is definitely the most appropriate for the time being," he adds.

The improvement was immediately felt. The catch increased to 4,300 tons in 1997, as compared to 2,000 tons in 1992. CEDARE expects further progress.

The most important element of the strategy was the conciliation of conflicting parties. Last week, representatives of the various interests traveled to Tunisia, where they presented strategies for the resolution of complicated problems and the partial improvement of water quality. "It was quite impressive. Before, they were indifferent; now, they are setting an example which can be emulated in other countries suffering from a similar problem," Abdel-Rehim concludes.

Hunting down the law

Despite legislation which forbids hunting in protected areas and natural habitats, Egypt's wildlife remains at risk. **Gihan Shahine** wonders whether the problem is the law — or its enforcement

Last month, two tourists were about to embark on their private boat, anchored in Safaga port, when police guards smelled a pungent odour. The source seemed to be the tourists' luggage. On closer examination, the police found gazelle meat among the tourists' possessions. Although gazelles are protected under domestic laws and international treaties, and Safaga is a protected area, the tourists had been hunting.

At the same port, another car was stopped by police. It contained ten gazelles plus frozen meat and 17 stuffed gazelles.

In both cases, the gazelles, vehicles, and weapons were confiscated and a fine of LE5,000 was imposed on the culprits for breaching the hunting laws.

But these are only two cases. Another dozen recently made newspaper headlines. Last month, *Al-Akhbar* reported several incidents of gazelle hunting in Hurghada. Fathi Heggi, the director of the Al-Rayyan falcon reservation, says that twelve cases were filed against hunters this year. The ministry of the environment recently confiscated nine falcons from tourists. And many conservationists maintain that arrests represent at most five per cent of hunting activities actually taking place in Egypt.

"Wildlife is still largely endangered, despite all the laws," warns Richard Hoath, a fellow of the Zoological Society of London, contributor to the *BBC Wildlife Magazine* and author of many books on Egypt's wildlife. He explains that the triple onslaught of pollution, urban encroachment and unregulated hunting has taken a great toll on Egypt's natural heritage. "Egyptians should be more aware that the natural heritage is as important as Egypt's historical antiquities."

Many conservationists agree that Egypt's natural heritage is crying out for attention. The 18 protected areas covering 19 million feddans (7.5 per cent of the country's surface) contribute to halting depletion. But some of the damage may be irreversible.

Law 102/1983 categorically bans hunting inside protected zones. The full protection of wildlife, however, should be provided by the Environment Law (Law 4/1994), which prohibits hunting throughout Egypt, and by the international treaties Egypt has signed, which identify endangered species. This legislation also includes strict specifications that regulate the hunting of certain species of birds and ducks, establishing the times at which they may be hunted as well as numbers, licences, weapons and hunting grounds. The laws also regulate the gathering of species used in scientific experiments and the extraction of serum.

According to the Environment Law, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) is the authority responsible for the enforcement of this legislation, a task it must discharge in cooperation with the Ministries of Interior, Tourism, and Defence. Its jurisdiction includes issuing licences and identifying the species that need to be conserved. If a violation is detected, the guards assigned to the relevant area report to the police.

Recent official statistics, however, indicate that this legislation is still being violated. Due to hunting, 35 of 106 mammal species, 16 of 450 bird species, and 15 of 100 reptile and amphibious species are on the verge of extinction in Egypt.

Environmentalists and conservationists warn that the Dorcus and slender-horned gazelle, Nubian ibex, Barbary sheep, oryx, leopard, cheetah, crocodile, wolf, and hyena are about to disappear from Egypt. The Houbara bustard and the falcon face a severe threat. The lizard population has declined precipitously, and turtles have almost disappeared.

"If incidents of over-hunting persist, I am afraid there won't be any animals or birds in the Egyptian desert very soon," laments Mindi Bahaaeddin, national coordinator of a study on hunting management for the EEAA and organiser of bird-watching tours. "This means not only damage to the eco-balance in natural habitats, but also the loss of a good potential source of income that eco-tourism generates. Egyptians are being robbed of their natural resources, especially since the reintroduction of animals that have been killed off here is very costly."

Many species, Hoath adds, are protected by the law because they are beneficial to agriculture, a prime source of national income. "Many birds prey on rats and mice that damage crops," he explains. "If the birds were eradicated by hunting, the country would have to spend money on chemicals like pesticides and insecticides."

The hunters are mostly tourists who, unable to hunt in their own countries, head to the Egyptian desert where they feel they can break the laws, Bahaaeddin explains. Mohamed Ibrahim, an official in the EEAA's department of protected areas, agrees: "Arab tourists, to whom hunting is culturally important, constitute the bulk of gazelle and falcon hunters." Hoath adds that many Europeans, especially Maltese and Italian citizens, have also been spotted "shooting all the birds and animals in sight" in Egypt's protected areas.

Most of the hunters bribe the Bedouin residents, who know the desert better than anyone, to guide them to the best potential hunting locations. Some are caught exiting the country with the animals they have killed or captured, but many escape across the border.

Local merchants were also among the violators, according to the EEAA's Ibrahim. He explains that the illegal animal trade is a most lucrative business — "second only to drug-dealing". The price of one live falcon ranges between LE30,000 and LE70,000, he estimates.

Kerdasa and Abu Rawash are the most famous animal markets. Business at the second, however, has dwindled recently, after repeated raids and confiscation campaigns carried out by the EEAA. Still, in a back-street shop, stuffed gazelles sell for LE300, falcons for LE70, ibex for LE60 and dub lizards for LE70 to LE120. Another shop displays rabbit and wolf pelts, at prices which can reach thousands of pounds, depending on the size of the fur.

Are these wide-ranging transgression made possible by loopholes in the law, or is enforcement the main problem? Could improving public awareness be the answer?

"Legislation must be reviewed and more stringent punishments should be imposed," Heggi says. The law stipulates that violators must pay a fine of LE200 to LE5,000. Vehicles and weapons must also be confiscated. "Even the maximum fine is insignificant, however, as compared to the money the tourists pay the Bedouin guides," Ibrahim emphasises. His suggestion? "A prison sentence".

Some conservationists, on the other hand, believe that, although the legislation may be flawed, it gives the government the authority to take offenders to court. "But the laws are hardly enforced," Hoath affirms. "Environmental laws are bypassed or ignored and those who are meant to apply them are not efficiently educated in how to do so. The only areas that are properly managed are Ras Mohamed and Saint Catherine in Sinai, which have funding from the European Union."

Hoath has taken photos of illegally hunted gazelles, ibex and birds and shown them to officials and an organiser of hunting safaris. His warnings, however, seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

According to Bahaaeddin, the laws provide a good basis for hunting management, but studies must be conducted on their implementation. A survey of different species should be conducted and a list of endangered species must be appended to the law, she suggests.

"It is shocking that Egypt, a country so advanced in many fields, still does not have a hunting management system. Today, all Arab countries enforce such a system," she adds.

Clearly, however, natural conservation is not as high a priority as economic problems, or even pollution. Very little is spent on enforcing anti-hunting legislation and protecting endangered species.

Yet Bahaeddin believes that conservation will even prove profitable. "The government should sell licences to Egyptian and foreign hunters, who should also be informed about the hunting regulations in Egypt," she suggests. "Trophy fees should be collected from game hunters. Hunting reserves can also be rented. And the revenue could then be used in the conservation of natural resources."

Public awareness, however, is the government's current focus. Efforts in that area include raids on animal markets, acquainting tourists with hunting regulations through the Ministry of Tourism and tourism companies, ordering Egyptian port authorities not to allow any tourist with four-wheel drive vehicles or weapons into the country, and acquainting Bedouins and licensed hunters with the losses they will incur if natural habitats are over-exploited. "We need more public awareness, which should be the role of the media," notes Ibrahim.

Through the government's efforts, the message seems to be getting through. Ahmed Rifa'i, a trader who hunts and sells reptiles to university labs and scientific research centres, says he has learned how to follow the EEAA's directives. "I would never exceed my quota, for this would mean the extinction of some species and the loss of my livelihood," he explains.

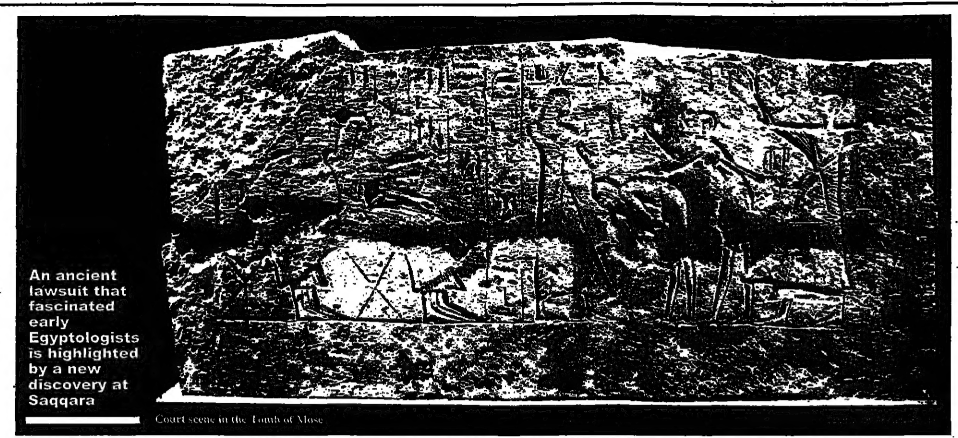
"There is no doubt awareness has significantly increased," says Bahaaeddin. "The government is exerting efforts to control the animal trade and to reduce incidents of hunting in protected areas."

Salama Ahmed Salama, a veteran journalist and the founder of the Environmental Writers' Association, agrees. He adds that the enforcement of the Environment Law has brought about some progress, if only because it has made the EEAA the sole licensing authority. "I am optimistic that more progress will be made with the increase in public awareness," Salama says.

Recently, the government has also begun to allocate a comparatively larger part of the budget to the conservation of biological resources. Egypt contributed $3 million to the Egyptian-European project to develop the five protected areas of south Sinai, representing 42 per cent of Sinai's surface. The European side has allocated $12 million to the project, which should be completed in three years. Recently, Minister of Environment Nadia Makram Ebeid also inaugurated a new LE3 million environmental research and monitoring lab in south Sinai.

Top: in Lake Mariut, struggles among conflicting interests have wreaked considerable damage. Here, a road cuts through the much diminished and polluted lake.
Above: the trade in illegally hunted species continues. Gazelles and other creatures are killed and stuffed, to spend the rest of time frozen in grotesque poses on an amateur's mantel
photos: Mohamed Mosaad

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**



Court scene in the Tomb of Mose

Ancient litigant's tomb discovered 100 years later

The tomb of Mose, a Pharaonic official known to us from the text of a famous court dispute, has been found after almost a hundred years of excavations. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

Last month an Egyptian mission working at Saqqara within Teti's necropolis compound accidentally unearthed a burial shaft on the north-eastern side of Khweet's pyramid. The shaft plunges three metres below the desert floor. At the bottom is a small limestone tomb 12 metres square carved into the bedrock. Investigation proved that this was the last resting place of Ptah-Mess or Mose.

"The location of the tomb was never suspected," said Zahi Hawass, director-general of the Giza Plateau. Yet the earliest evidence for its existence dates to 1897 when French Egyptologist Victor Loret excavated the tomb chapel, a superstructure containing a series of fascinating reliefs.

The reliefs told the story of the longest court case ever to be heard in ancient times, which took place during the Rameside period. This fired the excavators' enthusiasm to locate the rest of the tomb, but despite much digging over the following years, nothing came to light. The surviving reliefs and architectural elements were put on display in the Egyptian Museum, where they can still be seen on the first floor.

Gaballa Ali Gaballa, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), says that this find not only revealed much of the form of ancient Egyptian civil law, "but also showed a family struggling for a piece of land for almost 100 years".

Gaballa explained that the case started when King Ahmose I offered a piece of land, which now proves to be the site of Mose's tomb, to a person called Nehsi in return for his military service. After his death, his children inherited the land and assigned one of their brothers to oversee it.

"The agreement held for 300 years, until Haremhab's era, when Nehsi's granddaughter inherited the land, and the struggle for control began. The dispute was taken to court, on one occasion by the granddaughter, on another by the grandson, until Moses finally presented witnesses attesting the fact that as Nehsi's grandson he had the legal right to oversee and own the land," said Gaballa. "The jury then finally returned the land to Mose," he added.

Four canopic jars, three statuettes and 11 limestone blocks were found inside the tomb. The four canopic jars are made of red clay and have human-headed lids, two with long beards and one with traces of white cement on it. Two of the statuettes are made of limestone while the third is of black basalt. "All were in very bad condition and were quickly restored," said Hawass.

The tomb walls are decorated with scenes showing the owner with different deities and with scenes of his domestic life where he is shown with his wife and children. A black polished limestone bust with hieroglyphic text was also found as well as remains of a column. All these objects are now being stored at Saqqara pending restoration of the tomb, when the other elements now in the Egyptian Museum will be reintegrated into the ensemble.

Book Review

Tomb piecemeal

The Memphite Tomb-Chapel of Mose, Gaballah A. Gaballah. Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1977

When Gaballa A. Gaballa's book, *The Memphite Tomb-Chapel of Mose*, was published, it was the first integral publication and reconstruction of a well-known tomb whose claim to fame rested on a unique legal text transcribed by Sir Alan Gardiner in 1905. Gaballa traced the somewhat chequered history of the tomb from fragmentary inscriptions by Sir John Nicholson in 1866, subsequent excavation by Victor Loret, publication of what became known as the Legal Text in 1901 by Loret and Moret and Gardiner's classic study of it in 1905. Then came a lapse of 35 years during which no mention was made of the tomb.

Archaeology is an exciting business. It's a bit like trying to complete a complicated jigsaw puzzle with most of the parts missing. Interest is renewed as each vital clue gives more of the overall picture. But the pieces, that is to say the evidence, is not always to be found on the site of the discovery. Blocks from the tomb of Mose somehow found their way, by acquisition on the open market or from pillage of the site, into the Nicholson Museum in Sydney, the Kestner Museum in Hanover and the Cairo Museum. It was in the latter that Egyptologists R. Anthes and E. Luddeckens worked in the 1940s, further transcribing texts from photos earlier provided by Gardiner and some miscellaneous blocks in storage.

It was also in the Cairo Museum that Gaballa, general-secretary of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, became interested in the tomb-chapel of Mose. On studying the monuments stored there in 1960, he discovered that two whole chambers of the tomb had never been mentioned in any Egyptological literature. Moreover, among the objects was a pillar and door jambs. Here was certainly a project worth tackling and Gaballa decided to accumulate as much material as possible from available evidence, provide a reconstruction of the chapel, describe scenes, translate the remaining texts and present a full translation of the famous legal text.

The task he set himself was to trace the history of Mose and his family through genealogies as well as follow the course of the lawsuit. The work, published by Aris & Phillips, Warminster, England in 1977, won Gaballa the coveted State Award of Merit. Some odd blocks of stone from the tomb were expected to turn up from time to time but there the matter rested.

The recent discovery of the actual location of the tomb at Saqqara *(see above story)* has focused interest on Mose and his tomb-chapel once again. This man, as outlined in Gaballa's *The Memphite Tomb-Chapel of Mose*, lived during the reign of Ramses II but his history can be traced back to a distant forefather, Neshi, who lived some three centuries earlier. Neshi had fought in the war against the Hyksos around 1557 BC, and Gaballa traced his descendants, the members of his clan, the immediate family of Mose and associates of Mose's family.

The remarkable legal text, which has attracted Egyptologists since its first publication at the turn of the 20th century, contains singular testimonies in the land dispute:

"...I was the child of Huy, son of Urnero, the daughter of Neshi. A share was allocated for Urnero together with her brothers and sisters in the Great Court in the time of the King Haremhab... Then there was despatched the priest of the litter Aniy who was the officer of the court, to the village of Neshi.

"Allocation was made for me together with my brothers and sisters. My mother, the citizen Urnero, was made trustee for her brothers and sisters...

"But Takharu, the sister of Urnero, disputed with Urnero in the great court. An officer of the court was despatched and every one of the six heirs was made to know his share...

"...Then Nubnofret, my mother, came to cultivate the share of Neshi, my father. But one prevented the cultivating of it. She complained against the trustee Khay... Because I have been thrown out from this land of my father Neshi... Let there be brought for me the land-register from the treasury and likewise from the officer of the Granary of Pharaoh, Life, Prosperity, Health: I am confident that I am the daughter of Neshi. Allocation was made for me together with them. I do not acknowledge... the agent Khay as brother..."

And so the case continued, with testimonies from Papa, a temple priest, Hori, the bee-keeper of the treasury of the pharaoh, the citizen Tentpaihay, and others.

"As Amun endures, as the ruler endures.. I am deprived of my share... "

" I shall speak truthfully to the pharaoh, Life, Prosperity, Health, I shall not speak falsely... "

"...If I speak falsely cut off my nose and ears, and let me be banished to Kush... "

Such phrases, painstakingly transcribed from surviving fragmentary evidence dispersed all over the globe, may now be augmented with new insights. Gaballa's book is no longer on the market which, in view of the new discovery, may not be so bad. Who knows what the sands hold in store, and an updated version of this story of excavation and discovery, family disputes and perhaps the longest law case in history, is eagerly awaited.

Reviewed by ***Jill Kamil***

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm; Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE346 for Egyptians,LE1145 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE254 for Egyptians, LE831 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE899 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE947 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***

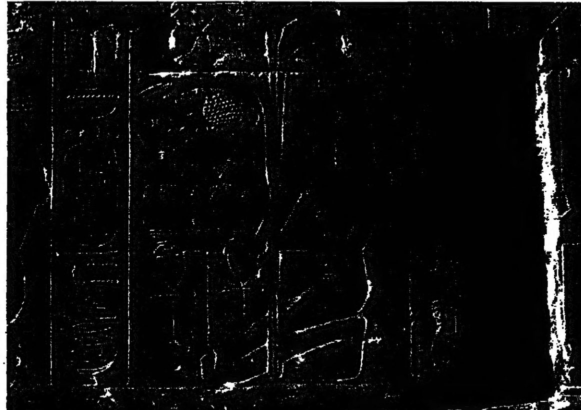
Respecting Osiris

THE EGYPTIAN mission excavating in Abydos has unearthed a mud-brick wall in the shape of the letter "L" southwest of the Temple of Ramses II. The wall, according to Yehia El-Masri, chief inspector at Abydos, probably completes the architectural layout of the existing temple. He said unearthing it is important "because it will reveal the structural annexes surrounding the temple."

Work on the temple was begun by Seti I and completed by his son, Ramses II, who built his own temple to the north. Mohamed El-Saghir, head of the Egyptian Antiquities Department at the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), told the *Weekly* that Abydos was a place of religious significance, the thriving hub of the Osiris faith. "Most of Egypt's kings erected symbolic shrines or monuments there as a sign respect for the legendary ancestor." El-Saghir said.

Two years ago the temple underwent restoration, during which parts of Ramses' statue were discovered.

"The wall will protect the temple from encroachment." El-Saghir said.

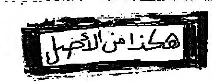


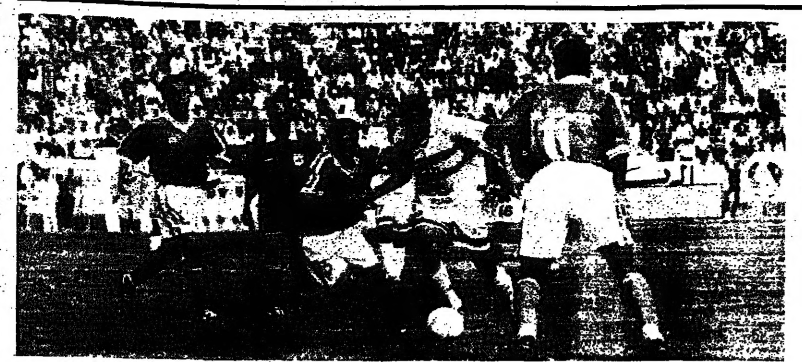
Hapi, the deified Nile

A JOURNEY to Abydos took Sherif Sonbol to the Temple of Ramses III where be photographed this relief of the Nile-god Hapi, kneeling and holding papyri in his left hand, and the fruits of the soil along with two symbols of life in the other. Depicted with a green face (the colour of the new crop) he was portrayed on monuments throughout the land and described as "father of the gods, lord of sustenance, who brings forth food and covers the two lands of Egypt with his products; who gives life, banishes want, and fills granaries to overflowing."

Today a different power controls the river; a lesser power because although the High Dam provides millions of watts of vital electric power, unlike Hapi it does not automatically revitalise the soil. Moreover, the river now transports waters that are polluted from misuse, mainly the dumping of industrial and sewage waste. It needs more than a prayer to Hapi to set things straight.







Magnificent Zamalek: a crucial challenge during a match at which a helmet was almost as necessary as a pair of boots photo: Ahmed Abdel-Razeq

Zamalek still in pursuit

The league is approaching the critical stage, with Ahli five points ahead of arch-rival Zamalek, and the provincial teams still striving to stay in the premier league. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports on the 22nd week

With three goals against Dina, Ahli's Hossam Hassan has probably never felt better. His team have been playing harmonious, high-spirited, well-organised football, and their confidence has increased by leaps and bounds ever since new technical coach Rainer Tschuble took over a month ago.

Zamalek, on the other hand, went through hell last Sunday, in an atmosphere of hooliganism unprecedented since the events of 1978. In the end, though, they came through to beat Ghazl El-Mahalla 2-1. Medhat Abdel-Nadi and his team-mates were showered with rocks on the Mahalla pitch and hailed with abuse from five thousand fanatic fans, before referee Abdel-Hamid Radwan and his assistants were forced to stop the game three minutes short of extra time.

Yet in this 22nd week of the league, Egyptian eyes were not all focused on the traditional power houses of Ahli and Zamalek. Arab Contractors who threatened to overtake Zamalek for a couple of weeks, before dropping back into third place, and Ismaili who played Ahli in the final game of last season and are currently lying fourth, also claimed some attention. As for El-Shams, they started the season with hopes of reaching the top, but practical experience has shown they still have a long long way to go before they can even feel happy at the bottom of the table.

Equipped with a new technical coach, a new spirit, and a newly self-confident Hossam Hassan, Ahli had little option but to beat Dina 4-1. The fans were hugely impressed with the team's organisation and clever tactics, which reminded them of the golden days when they used to go to matches to enjoy the spectacle and didn't need to worry about the final score. Even the new technical coach Tschuble said after the game that his team had performed exactly the way he wanted them to. "They managed to tire Dina out and they executed the tactics precisely as I had told them, concentrating their attacks through the centre and from the sides," Tschuble said. It was Sayed Abdel-Hafiz who sparked the first of a series of spectacular goals in the third minute, taking Dina by surprise. Not long after, Hassan charged down on a cross from Abdel-Hafiz for Ahli's second goal and his first. Ahli seemed unbeatable and always had the upper hand. Their third goal came when Hassan's twin Ibrahim crossed to him in the area, creating a golden opportunity Hossam made sure he did not miss. Trying to save their face, Dina ventured to make a couple of attempts on Ahli's goal, but Ahli's snappy counter-attacks soon had them running back to defend. However, when Dina's Adel Abdel-Sadek found a hole in Ahli's defence, he grabbed the chance to give his team what in the 33rd minute was already clearly a consolation goal. This was the signal their opponents needed to tighten their defence and recharge their attack. Just before the final whistle, Hossam appeared to score, but the referee called a penalty for Ahli, which the frustrated striker calmly tapped into the net, making it three for him and four for his team.

The 22nd week of the league was not as pleasant for Zamalek as for Ahli. Striving to overcome a five-point difference between them and the leaders, Zamalek had a frantic time with Ghazl El-Mahalla as five thousand home fans went wild with referee Abdel-Hamid Radwan for what they saw as persistent favouritism. *Mahalla* were leading by one goal, when the referee gave a penalty to Zamalek from which Medhat Abdel-Hadi scored. When the visitors added a second goal, the Ghazl El-Mahalla fans could not take it anymore and they showered the referees and the opposing team with rocks, while dozens invaded the pitch and attempted to assault the referee. Police managed to stop the invasion, but the climate did not improve, and in the end Radwan had to stop the game before injury time was up, giving the victory to Zamalek. But despite their bravery in the face of so much naked aggression, Zamalek still lag Ahli by five points. Hard luck Zamalek.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Undervaulting ambition

As the national gymnastics team with its precocious star Raouf Abdel-Karim heads to the African Championships in Namibia, *we raise the question: what's holding Egypt back?*

Together with more than 24 Egyptian gymnasts, Raouf Abdel-Karim flew to Namibia last week to participate in the African Championships which are being held from 20 to 26 April, writes **Eman Abdel-Moeti**. This is the first time Abdel-Karim has participated in the African Championships as a senior, though as a junior he won two gold medals and one bronze.

Since his gold medal in the Mediterranean Games last year, he has become the federation's hope of reviving Egypt's golden days of gymnastics, when we used to produce Olympic champions. The fact that he is at his best on two apparatus, the horse and the horse vault, has made federation officials seek out other young gymnasts whose talents are similarly specialised. In the holy month of Ramadan last year, the federation organised a new type of competition where each gymnast chooses two apparatus to perform on instead of having to confront all six.

Federation officials are currently preparing Raouf for the Sydney Olympics. He has spent the last two months in a closed camp in Belarus, and participated in the Romanian Open and the Paris Grand Prix for the best 12 gymnasts in the world.

Although many officials believe in his talent, their hesitation to send him and other promising young gymnasts to participate in international championships is the main reason we have failed to produce world champions since the 1960's. Our national team reigns on the African and Arab level, but they are deprived of any international experience for reasons which remain obscure.

Last year, gymnastics federation officials announced at a press conference celebrating Raouf's gold medal that *they would send him to the World* Championships held last August in Switzerland, but later went back on their word. Both they and the national team coach Alexander Ivanov thought the young man did not stand a chance against the world's toughest gymnasts. "Raouf competed against only four of the world's top competitors in the Mediterranean Games. In the World Championships, he would have had to compete against the same competitors and at least eight other of the best countries in the world. It could be a shock for him to find himself lagging behind in the overall ranking," Ivanov explained. If the national coach does not believe in one of his best performers, how can he believe in any of the other members of his team?

According to Raouf's father, the president of the International Gymnastics Federation was so impressed with the young gymnast that he encouraged him to participate in the World Championships, which were a qualifier for the Paris Grand Prix. "Even when Raouf failed to go to Switzerland," his father continued, "the president gave him another chance to compete against the best gymnasts of the world at the Grand Prix in Paris, but his records were not officially recognised". Thus not only did Raouf miss two important championships in the last two years, he also missed a chance to compare his performance with that of the gymnasts he will probably be competing against in Sydney.

Federation officials believe that for Raouf to participate in a World Championship or another top competition such as the Grand Prix, his record on the horse vault, his best apparatus, should be at least 9.8. Abdel-Karim won his gold medal in the Mediterranean Games with 9.225 points, and in the Romanian Open which hosted the world's top countries in the game, he won third place in the individual event with an average of 9.425. This advance is a significant achievement in less than a year.

Ivanov thinks it is possible for Abdel-Karim to reach an average of 9.800 well before the Sydney Olympics if he maintains the same level of training, and many officials in the federation believe he is a guaranteed medal for Egypt. But they seem to have overlooked the importance of international competition not only for Raouf but for the whole national team if they want to win more medals in 2000. African and Arab competitions are not enough. We should be looking *beyond our arch-rivals South* Africa and Algeria if we want to reach world championship levels. Doubting our gymnasts' potential and talents will not help us establish an international reputation.

On the African level, our rhythmic gymnastics team and the men's artistic gymnastics team have consistently been placed first. Both teams have also produced some promising young talents who unfortunately did not get the chance to compete in a major international event like the Mediterranean Games. If the these two teams win their events again this year as they have in the past, isn't it time for them to move on to bigger stage?

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

230 The Egyptian nationalist movement against British occupation and government repression took a new turn in 1912, as mysterious leaflets began to appear throughout the country, signed by the "Black Hand Society". Yet strangely, the campaign ended as soon as the man who had been arrested on the charge of masterminding it was released from prison. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story from reports published by *Al-Ahram*

"It is greatly in the interests of an agrarian nation such as Egypt that the process of adjudication of disputes takes place in the areas where the litigants reside. Farmers are so preoccupied with their labours, notably the requirements of irrigation, that they find it difficult to leave their fields for any length of time in order *to travel to the courts* in the district capitals. In addition, they find it difficult, in some matters, to comprehend the legal minutiae to which expert judges refer in their rulings, while the judges themselves rarely take into account the established local practices of the farmers in their dealings with one another, such as the organisation of communal use of the waterwheels, joint ownership of livestock, and rental arrangements for ploughs and other farming equipment. Indeed, there are no provisions in the law to cover many of these arrangements.

"And even if such provisions do exist, they are very inadequate, particularly as the long-established practices among the villagers vary greatly from one area to the other."

The preceding extract from a lengthy report of the minister of justice published in *Al-Ahram* on 9 May 1912 succinctly expresses a prevalent criticism of the national court system operating in Egypt at the turn of the century. However, attempts to address the shortcomings mentioned in the minister's report date back to the origins of the national justice system under the Khedive Ismail. In her book, *The Modern Egyptian Justice System 1875-1914*, Dr. Latifa Salem discusses the "Village Claims Councils" that had been established in most of the villages of the Delta. These boards were headed by the village sheik or elder and consisted of an additional two popularly elected members who had to be landowners, farmers or merchants resident in the village for at least five years. Their period of service was two years and the post *was not remunerated*. The function of these rural judicial panels was to arbitrate in disputes that arose among the local farmers over landholding borders, irrigation, ownership of livestock, labour wages and all civil cases involving claims less than 50 piastres. The competency of these rural courts also extended to some minor criminal offences such as the theft of money or of property the value of which did not exceed 25 piastres or incidents of violence for which the maximum penalty was *24 hours* imprisonment and in which no sharp instruments were used.

When the country fell under British occupation in 1882, rural society underwent numerous changes as a result of the process of capitalist transformation. Among these changes were the expansion in the base of land ownership and the emergence of a new class of rural dignitaries, which in turn engendered the *omda*, or village mayor system. The *omda* was generally the head of the most prominent village family. *Second in authority* were two village sheikhs with specifically defined areas of jurisdiction. In the 1890s, as the *omda* system expanded and became more firmly entrenched, the village mayors began to supplant the authorities of the Village *Claims Councils. A 1895 decree* granted village mayors the right to arbitrate in cases of offences subject to a maximum fine of 25 piastres and a prison sentence of 24 hours or less. Three years late another decree gave them the right to arbitrate in civil suits involving claims worth 100 piastres or less.

The *omda* courts had certain advantages. In his annual report for 1907, the British high commissioner noted a sharp decline in the number of civil suits in the countryside. "When the villagers learned that the *omda* has the right to compel them to pay small fines, they began to resolve their disputes among themselves before having to resort to litigation," he wrote. The problem, however, was that frequently the village mayors abused their authority. An indication of how widespread this phenomenon had become can be found in a Ministry of Justice directive of 1898 prohibiting the village mayors from adjudicating in cases in which the defendant was a relative or a worker in their employ. Certainly, letters to *Al-Ahram* reveal that the village mayors were not above tampering with the evidence.

Among the other shortcomings of the rural judicial system, according to the adviser to the Ministry of Justice, was that the more familiar the judge was with the litigants *the less was their* confidence in his integrity and their respect for his person. Also, the increasing administrative responsibilities of the village mayors in conjunction with the growing demands of their personal interests rendered them increasingly reluctant to take on the burdens of the village judge. It was not odd, in light of these disadvantages, that Egyptians would devise a new formula for a rural justice system. This was to be found in the district courts, or what *Al-Ahram* termed "the villagers' *courts*."

The law establishing the district courts, published in *Al-Ahram* on 9 May 1912, illustrates how much rural society had changed during three decades since the British occupation. The growth of a powerful agrarian upper *class is evidenced by the composition* of the rural tribunals. These consisted of five rural notables who had to be at least 25 years old and literate, property owners in the district and of high moral repute. These courts were authorized to adjudicate on claims involving transferable property worth no more than 500 piastres, wage payments worth no more than 1,000 piastres, destruction of crops, rents for housing or land, ownership or use of livestock, joint farming rights on land the area of which did not exceed three feddans and the restitution of property.

The new law also addressed at least one of the previous court system's failings. It stipulated that the district courts should "observe those established local practices that do not violate the principles of justice and natural law." The courts were also enjoined to "seek to effect a reconciliation between the litigants in all cases before them." Of course, as the villagers' court system was established solely to address non-felonious lawsuits in the countryside, the law also stipulated that its provisions were not applicable in the provincial capitals.

Abdel-Hafez Hussein El-Assiouti, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Assiout, was the first to report on the establishment of the villagers' courts in his province. But he *had certain reservations* about the selection of tribunal members, expressing the hope that at least they would be "honourable men who will act above their personal interests." If the government did not select men of integrity, he argued, "the endeavour will be subverted and the rulings of the courts will become weapons for revenge".

These qualms were shared by many in the countryside, and the scramble among rural notables to put themselves forward as candidates for the tribunal *did little to lay them to rest. We note* from the reports of other *Al-Ahram* provincial correspondents that the prospective candidates were not motivated by immediate financial gain. The position was not salaried; in fact, candidates had to pay an LE15 application fee. *Rather*, "*the spirit of rivalry for this* position emanates from the quest for elevated status and the desire to show off."

Al-Ahram, for its part, was concerned that the prospective judges lacked the necessary familiarity with the law. Its correspondent from *Minia* warned of the dangers of this and suggested that the government "offer the judges that are selected lessons in the particulars of the legal process so that the judges do not rule out of ignorance and lack of knowledge."

In the summer of *1912*, the government announced the results of the selection process for the district courts. *Al-Ahram* of 2 August allocated extensive space to the report from Assiout. El-Assiouti appeared very satisfied with the results, saying that "heads nodded to the fairness of the choices." And in tacit affirmation of the social origins of the district court members, he wrote, "all of them are from the best families, have high-level educational certificates, and have a good standing among the people." Similar reports came from *Al-Ahram*'s reporters in other provincial centres.

From the outset, the new district court judges performed their duties with earnest dedication. In the course of their work they encountered numerous issues that were not covered by the law. The right to legal counsel was one such issue, and the judges concurred that "in order to alleviate the financial burden on the farmers, there will be no need for lawyers in these courts."

They also examined the relationship between the district courts and regular courts of first instance in their provinces. According to the new law, some cases before the district court could be appealed before the courts of first instance.

The competency of the courts was a third issue to draw their attention. The judges proposed that the villagers' courts be authorised to adjudicate on charges the maximum penalty for which was a week, rather than only 24 hours, imprisonment. They argued that this would "render these courts more influential, alleviate the pressures on the courts of first instance and speed the course of justice."

Other problems before the district courts were taken up by parliament. Of *major importance were the informal*, unnotarised contracts for the disposition of property. In February 1913, parliament resolved to give the district courts competency over these cases as well, "as the local notables on these courts are familiar with the parties to *the contract and the property under* contract, which will enable them to detect the flaws in some contracts and to help the parties to the contract understand the defects. There are now more than 200 district courts in the country."

The potential for harm was indeed great. A memorandum from *the minister* of justice said that the farmers, who were generally illiterate, "sign these contracts with their personal seals. These seals are frequently stolen and used to sign contracts unbeknownst to the owner of the seal. Also, *the farmer may be ignorant* of a subtle point in the contract to which he has affixed his seal, causing him considerable loss of fortune, particularly as the Egyptian lawmaker has not legislated guarantees to protect the ignorant from the consequences of their ignorance and to safeguard the *gullible* from deceit."

While parliament debated the issue of informal contracts, the villagers' courts gained additional powers. As *Al-Ahram* reported on 26 March 1913, they now had the authority to rule on quarrels and assaults in which no serious wounds were inflicted and on the refusal to comply with the demands of mayors upon the populace made in accordance with the law.

Naturally, the new authorities of the district courts were subjected to various criticisms. Among the most contentious issues was the right of the defendants to contest the competence of the court or one of its members for a given hearing. Given the close interrelations in Egyptian rural society, there would be a high likelihood that there could be a kinship bond between one of the judges and the defendant.

The most important criticism was voiced in a letter to *Al-Ahram* that appeared on 28 May 1913 beneath the headline, "The district courts and the problems of merchants in litigation." The writer complained that it was unfair that debtors be tried in villagers' courts in their own area of jurisdiction. "It is most unreasonable that an individual can buy merchandise or livestock and postpone payment indefinitely, while the creditor, in order to claim his rights, is forced to suffer the inconvenience of putting his affairs on hold and to bear the expenses of travelling back and forth between his village *and the village of the debtor every* time he has to attend a session of the trial." The solution, he proposed, was for the government "to have mercy on merchants by decreeing that their suits should be brought before the courts of first instance immediately," while restricting *the jurisdiction of district* courts to the lawsuits between the villagers themselves.

In spite of these criticisms, the reports of the adviser to the Ministry of Justice for 1912-1913 suggest that the district courts were very successful. More and more cases were being brought before the courts.

For example, within a three-month period in 1913 the district courts ruled on 1,327 criminal offences and 9,953 civil suits. In addition, the Ministry of Justice only received a handful *of complaints concerning the rulings* of these courts. More importantly, according to these reports, the new courts had served to protect the farmers from the lengthy delays they used to encounter when resorting to the ordinary courts, and the *fact that the judges were familiar* with the customs of the villagers enabled them to reduce significantly the level of acrimony between the litigants. Also, the farmers, accustomed to deference to the families of the prominent village notables, were more willing to accept the rulings of the judges. Finally, while the diversion of many suits to the district courts also had the unanticipated consequence of depleting the revenues of the national courts, the villagers' courts were an important landmark in the on-going process of facilitating and streamlining legal procedures in the history of the Egyptian justice system.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Al-Ahram Weekly 23 - 29 April 1998

Fayek Hanna, Mustafa Kamel and Shukri Ali El-Badri:

Keepers of the gates

Ancient cats and singing babies, tempests and collapsing chairs





photo: Sherif Sonbol

An opera house is neither a cheese nor a tomb, though its shape suggests both. It is, or was before the electronic age, a temple for the performing arts of music. Now it has slid down off its pedestal into the ordinary world, and great changes are sweeping through it.

Singers are travelling salesmen for an opera house. The more famous they are, the more travel-strained. They descend upon the theatre, lucky to get rehearsals at all, do the performance and, after some days seeing the sights, have gone off again to a new cheese. It is not an attractive design, but neither is the life of a singer in this age. The more famous, the more in orbit they become.

So everything is in motion at an opera, except the opera house itself. And there are people, beings, who stay with it and belong to its halls and corridors. They are the true spirits of the opera house, its servants, its handmaidens: they are more than employed, they are "called". It's a mystic state most of them do not even consider discussing.

Without these people, the opera could not function for a single performance. They are few, invaluable and outside most ordinary disciplines. Such is the trust in which they are held, an opera house values such people more than the stars who shine intermittently. They form the orbit in which stars can shine and decline, but they themselves more or less go on forever. Hardly seen by the general public, their financial rewards are not the factor which keeps them at the opera house at all. They belong by their right of dedication to the incomprehensibilities of opera. The incomprehensible is doing quite well, it seems, because it makes a change from the deadly routine which is engulfing the other arts.

There is nothing secure in an opera house. Madame the pre-Madonna's throat is a fragile, capricious object. To be part of this irrational space-circus which is opera offers some people more thrills than professional football. Anyway, like football it can be an area of dedicated, reckless courage, the kind that held the ancient Romans enthralled like a chariot race. Every tenor is a Ben Hur.

This particular House, like all its family throughout the world, has a dome on the top of a spread group of buildings around its base. This particular one is now ten years old. Day or night, it never closes. Performances go on and cease, but the ear and eye and machinery never stop. It is an entity with a life like an international news circus. It moves in a motion without end.

Now it is the daytime space. It is alive with strange noises, threads of sound, unrelated voices taking off and whirling around the opera house. Trucks shunt in and out, and people arrive with briefs and bags. Everyone hurries, the stage door is always alive — boxes of every shape and size are delivered and disappear. Musicians enter, are checked and move on to the door leading to rehearsal rooms. Instruments are lugged about with professional care. Wind, brass, small strings and large ones, cellos and double basses, all heading for the work appointments. It is like the Paris metro, or a large public hospital. Everyone is going somewhere. No one sits down. Into the depths of the cave where the incomprehensibilities begin.

A man moves along with this traveller and speaks. Who are those up there? Stars rehearsing *Il Trovatore*. They sound awful, but it will be OK on the night.

We move together into the scooped-out cavern in semi-darkness lit by pink shadows. This is the place itself, the stage, the auditorium and the altar where it all takes place. Stages are always dream places of total reality. Small stages are lovable, huge ones like this are intimidating. No fuss here, they are workers darting around silently like fish in a deep aquarium. These are the people who really keep the big show going. Reef-like forms, darting in and out of their particular caves. All *sotto voce*.

We have reached a cupboard-like space at the side of the stage, full of the debris of some sort of show. Panels and packing cases imprison us and three men are standing waiting. They are introduced by Sherif Sonbol, the photographer. Fayek Hanna, lighting; Mustafa Kamel, keeper for the storage of instruments; Shukri Ali El-Badri, foreman.

In the quarterings of names about the opera house, these men occupy an honourable position. They represent tradition, service, mutual trust and authority. They are Elders, ancients of the house, and whatever sharp speaking about things not being done on time does not apply to them.

Here they are together in the lean-to shelter provided for us at the side of the stage. None are tall: they are medium-sized men, quiet, brisk, radiating goodwill and a sort of pleasure. It shows that they really love their work.

It is a banality to over-estimate the young, but it pays off. However, there is something happening in Cairo which suggests change, maybe the end of the world or a big new public for the Cairo Opera. Mr Instruments, Mustafa Kamel, says "it has to do with the changes of the new world economy as it hits Egypt." From the Opera House director comes good news for Mustafa Kamel — the opera must have a Steinway, and one will soon appear. The sheer cost of the beautiful monster will astound. The director also says three new harps are coming. The concert life of the opera is gradually changing into one of international status: harps are demanded by players and Steinways are a necessity. They already have a Bosendorf and a few Yamahas at the opera, but the ultimate Steinway is demanded by all visiting pianists.

Pianos are Mustafa Kamel's chief headache. They are sensitive beyond anything they suggest, subject to rheumatism, sinusitis and backache. They are neurotic, subject to fits of withdrawal. As with high-bred horses, never attempt to put down a piano. They sulk and withdraw. Tale of piano incidents abound. Mustafa Kamel remembers Ramzi Yassa's accident and the resulting blood-spattered keyboard on which he continued his concert. Moushira Eissa's piano broke a string which was mended by Mustafa Kamel almost as it was being played.

His cares are old, fine and fussy violins worth fortunes and a mass of nerves if left for a moment in a stage draft; atmospheric disturbances can put down strings with influenza or bad temper. Like computers, they can turn nasty if ignored, so Mustafa Kamel, his timpani, his armies of violins, harps and drums, winds, brass and oboe, set the outsider into a mental downfall. He knows how many violins he has, with reinforcements during times of stress, where to keep them, how to clothe them, where nothing must be dropped or knocked. All instruments' life is one of dependents until the big moment comes, when his companion the player goes into action in the wide open space.

Think of the complications of safeguarding a full symphony orchestra, and you think of Mustafa Kamel. He never relaxes and has not sat down for eras. His ultimate trial, perhaps, will come when he is given by the director a Hamburg organ to take care of. "Instruments," he says, "have human face needs. Clean and nourish, massage and tone, including even the aesthetic face-lift if age sets into an old string instrument."

After instruments comes the person who is difficult to classify. Not a musician, his name is Shukri Ali El-Badri, coming from Mansoura. Whatever his name, he is known by one only — *'Amm* Shukri. He looks sweet, but take care: he could be as sharp as Alice in Wonderland. His wonderland is the entire place, the Opera House. He seems to be everywhere; you see him, then you don't. He's downstairs, coming into the central hall; before you turn around he is silently going up the second staircase of the Opera House. He has his own means of dealing with all of opera's business. He can be seen carrying sheaves of documents. Quick change, he is seen taking morning tea with the director of the Opera himself. He is a sort of an eminence unto himself — but not grise at all, carrying his weight of authority through the entire house. Mr Opera for short.

He seems to direct nothing, has no special position or absolute authority. He is almost subversively unknown to all except those working at the Opera, and that does include stars about whom he is entirely diplomatic. No gossip, he will carry his cargo of strange facts with him to paradise. Maybe he will haunt the Cairo Opera House instead of leaving.

He will bring tea for only one person, the director. He can remove himself from the usual people who sit around the main office and goes in and out like a bird. A magpie. He has bird's eyes, full of doubts and changing light — blue, black, green or hazel. Who gave him his eyes? Argus. And he makes use of them. He has a manner, a bow that would have done well in Versailles. He seems close to no one but to Mustafa Nagi who likes continuity in those around him, and has plenty of it with *'Amm* Shukri. He is so continuous, he signs on for immortality.

The last of the trio, Mr Lights, Fayek Hanna is the most important element in an opera house. Let there be light, and he provided it. He did not create light, the visiting light experts did that, but it is his duty to see that it was all carried out. Times are easier for lighting, but failures and shorts were a menace when Fayek Hanna began. Now it is the sheer complexity of lights that causes the worry. He has an on-line language entirely esoteric to cover lights — a dove-grey on shot leaking to yellow. He knows where all the fuses are and the buttons to press. 'Flooding' must be fun, and 'hot pops' which sound like potato chips.

Fayek Hanna says: "The old place was a true disaster — same size as La Scala, built by the same people. You can build another house, but it's the spirit inside it that matters. Thank God that the same spirit is developing here in the new place. They say Egyptians have no taste for opera, but the queues for tickets were not all foreigners. It will all come back again and it would be better because the young people love fantasy and new things. We work for them, for tomorrow."

All three, lights, instruments and Mr Opera, have happy memories of the last king of Egypt. He knew how to sit and gossip with them, provide wonderful feasts at which he sat and ate amongst them. He knew about the opera, but they will say no more. But the king was a dish unto himself.

The trio also have vivid shots of visitors to both the old and new opera houses. How much Gigli took per night. Seven hundred pounds — huge. What happened when Caniglia's chair gave way beneath her in *Traviata*. How to weather a Toscanini Tempest. Baritones and ladies, chapters full.

Then the fire — weeping.

Then the silence — the rot of the ensuing void.

Then the rebirth — and here it is. Sleeping Beauty up and about in the new forest.

And the future, no time now, another day. Those people from Milan and Moscow, the three are off to their posts. Another day.

Profile by **David Blake**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♠ Mark 30 April on your calendar in bright pink letters. Under the auspices of **Mrs Suzanne Mubarak**, The Cairo Sheraton Hotel Towers and Casino, in coordination with the Right to Live Association, is inviting you to celebrate the closing ceremony of the Sheraton Interschool Festival, an important charity-oriented event, in support of less advantaged children in Egypt. **Magda Sami**, public relations manager of the hotel, has assured me that this will be an evening to remember.



♥ Once more, wedding bells have been ringing: the music played as the charming bride, **Rehab Osama Gamil**, and her handsome groom, **Hamad Fathi Said**, twin brother of **Kamal**, our colleague at *Al-Ahram*, graced the traditional throne in the Lailati Ballroom of Air Forces House, while friends and relations wished them many years of happiness.

